

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

2026 SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN SCIENCE AWARDS (SAWISA)

THEME: PLACING WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

UCT internal deadline: Monday, 11 May 2026, 12h00

DSTI deadline: Sunday, 31 May 2026

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The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) calls for applications for the 2026 South African Women in Science Awards (SAWiSA). These awards recognise and reward excellence by women scientists and researchers, and profile them as role models for younger women. The awards will be made to South African women citizens or permanent residents in the Distinguished Young Woman and Distinguished Woman Researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Natural (Life and Physical) and Engineering Sciences (NES), and Public Engagement with Science categories, as well as in any field aligned with the special category: "Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change. Awards for students at master's and PhD level in the HSS and NES fields will be made under the DSTI Fellowship category.

THEME

The theme for the 2026 SAWiSA is: "Placing women at the centre of science, technology and innovation (STI)". It was adopted from the DSTI's newly embraced mantra: "Placing STI at the centre of government, education, industry and society." This echoes the Department's call to place STI at the core of every sector, while placing women themselves at the centre of this transformation. The theme emphasises that advancing gender equality in science is fundamental to achieving the Department's broader objective of embedding STI in the daily life of government, education, industry and society. Furthermore, recent STI indicators underscore this urgency, noting that while women's participation has increased at the level of science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and entry into the workforce system, their progression into leadership positions remains constrained. This reflects persistent structural barriers within the national system of innovation.

APPLICATION CRITERIA

- Applicants must be South African women citizens or permanent residents.
- Overall winners in the past 10 years are not eligible to apply in the categories in which they have previously won, although runners-up may do so.
- Applicants may enter in one category only.
- Previous recipients of DSTI Fellowships may not apply again for the same degree.

AWARD CATEGORIES

1. DISTINGUISHED WOMAN RESEARCHERS

Applicants should be established women scientists or researchers with at least five-years of professional experience conducting independent research. Their research projects must have made outstanding scientific contribution to advancing science and building the knowledge base in their areas of research not necessarily aligned with the theme.

Awards will be made in the following fields as well as in any field aligned with the theme:

- Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS)
- Natural Sciences (Life and Physical) and Engineering Sciences (NES)
- Public Engagement with Science
- Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change

Adjudication criteria

Applicants will be assessed on their track record of research outputs, research impact (research alignment with the DSTI Decadal Plan, societal and environmental Impact), professional and research experience, human capacity development, contribution to women and girl's empowerment to promote gender equality, science engagements, and collaborations.

In addition, in the Public Engagement with Science category, applicants must provide evidence of sharing their research findings with the public or employing citizen-science approaches where members of the public have clearly defined roles in the research process and their contributions are acknowledged in research reports and scientific publications.

Value of each award

Winner: R95 000 | First runner-up: R70 000 | Second runner-up: R45 000

Required documents:

- i. **A completed and signed Application Form** ([download here](#)) containing
 - **A completed CV template** (point 4 – 15).
 - **Evidence Public Engagement with Science** (if applicable category)(point 16): Indicate track record in sharing research findings with the public or employing citizen-science approaches where members of the public have clearly defined roles in the research process and their contributions are acknowledged in research reports and scientific publications.
 - **Proof of innovation or applied knowledge outputs for Theme category - Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change** (if applying for special category)(point 17)
List of intellectual property outputs with relevant registration numbers.
Indicate translation of research into Real-World Solutions and measurable Social and Community Impact.
 - **Short profile** (point 18).
- ii. **Proof of total Scientific/Research outputs** (optional appendix if ORCID numbers are not provided in point 6 of the form). Number your outputs.
- iii. **Three Reference Letters** discussing the nominee's professional competence, qualities and interests
- iv. **A certified copy of ID.**

2. DISTINGUISHED YOUNG WOMAN RESEARCHERS

Applicants should be women under the age of 40 or turning 41 in 2026 who have PhDs and whose research projects have contributed to advancing science and building the knowledge base.

Awards will be made in the following fields as well as in any field aligned with the theme:

- Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS)
- Natural (Life and Physical) and Engineering Sciences (NES)
- Public Engagement with Science
- Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change

Adjudication criteria

Applicants will be assessed on their track record of research outputs, research impact (research alignment with the DSTI Decadal Plan, societal and environmental Impact), professional and research experience, human capacity development, contribution to women and girl's empowerment to promote gender equality, science engagements, and collaborations.

In addition, in the Public Engagement with Science category, applicants must provide evidence of sharing their research findings with the public or employing citizen-science approaches where members of the public have clearly defined roles in the research process and their contributions are acknowledged in research reports and scientific publications.

Value of each award

Winner: R85 000 | First runner-up: R60 000 | Second runner-up: R35 000

Required documents:

- i. **A completed and signed Application Form** ([download here](#)) containing
 - **A completed CV template** (point 4 – 15).
 - **Evidence Public Engagement with Science** (if applicable category)(point 16): Indicate track record in sharing research findings with the public or employing citizen-science approaches where members of the public have clearly defined roles in the research process and their contributions are acknowledged in research reports and scientific publications.
 - **Proof of innovation or applied knowledge outputs for Theme category - Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change** (if applying for special category)(point 17)
List of intellectual property outputs with relevant registration numbers.
Indicate translation of research into Real-World Solutions and measurable Social and Community Impact.
 - **Short profile** (point 18).
- ii. **Proof of total Scientific/Research outputs** (optional appendix if ORCID numbers are not provided in point 6 of the form). Number your outputs.
- iii. **Three Reference Letters** discussing the nominee's professional competence, qualities and interests.
- iv. **A certified copy of ID**

3. SPECIAL CATEGORY: INNOVATION FOR IMPACT: WOMEN LEADING CHANGE

The two awards under this category will be made to a Distinguished Young Woman Researcher and a Distinguished (established) Woman Researcher in any field whose research has been successfully translated into real-world solutions with measurable social and community impact.

Applicants must be Distinguished Young Women scientists or researchers with a PhD degree, **under the age of 40 or turning 41 in 2026** and demonstrate how their research has translated into real-world solutions for social and community benefit. Distinguished Woman Researchers must be established scientists or researchers with **at least five years' professional experience** of independent research and demonstrate how their research has translated into real-world solutions for social and community benefit.

Adjudication criteria

Applicants will be assessed on the basis of the following:

- A proven record of research outputs, research impact, professional and research experience, and human capacity development.
- The translation of their research into real-world solutions. The panel will consider how effectively research has moved beyond academia into practical application, e.g. through the demonstrated implementation of a product, service, policy, intervention or technology; evidence that the solution is operational or has been piloted or adopted by a community, organisation or industry partner. There must be a clear pathway from research findings to real-world deployment.
- Measurable social and community impact. The panel will focus on tangible and meaningful outcomes achieved through the applicant's work, e.g. quantifiable improvements to social, economic, health, environmental or community wellbeing; testimonials, case studies, data or independent evaluations; and the reach and scale of the impact (locally or internationally).

Value of each award

Distinguished Young Woman Researcher: R90 000

Distinguished Woman Researcher: R100 000

Documents required:

Note: For this special category, point 17 in the application form must be completed to demonstrate evidence of the three areas listed under the "Adjudication criteria" above.

- i. **A completed and signed Application Form** ([download here](#)) containing
 - **A completed CV template** (point 4 – 15).
 - **Proof of innovation or applied knowledge outputs for Special Category - Innovation for Impact: Women Leading Change** (point 17)
List of intellectual property outputs with relevant registration numbers.
Indicate translation of research into Real-World Solutions and measurable Social and Community Impact.
 - **Short profile** (point 18).
- ii. **Proof of total Scientific/Research outputs** (optional appendix if ORCID numbers are not provided in point 6 of the form). Number your outputs.
- iii. **Three Reference Letters** discussing the nominee's professional competence, qualities and interests.
- iv. **A certified copy of ID**

4. DSTI MASTER'S AND PHD FELLOWSHIPS

Applicants should be women under the age of 35 who are South African citizens or permanent residents; registered for full-time study or research for master's or PhD degrees at UCT, or any public university in SA; and who are strong academic performers in their current or previous degrees.

The fellowships recognise the awardees' outstanding ability and potential in research, enhance their research experience and output, and encourage more young women to complete research degrees.

Fellowships will be awarded to:

- Seven master's students: 2 in natural sciences, 1 in engineering sciences, 1 in humanities and social Sciences, 1 in marine science, 1 in astronomy, 1 in public engagement with science.
- Seven PhD students: 2 in natural Sciences, 1 in engineering Sciences, 1 in humanities and social sciences, 1 in marine science, 1 in astronomy, 1 in public engagement with science.

Adjudication criteria

Applicants will be assessed on the basis if the following:

- Their academic performance, assessed in the context of their stage of study and the opportunities available.
- The quality and potential of their research contributions (including publications, presentations, research awards, patents, book chapters and student supervision), with emphasis on the significance.
- Their professional and research experience, as well as the quality and feasibility of their proposed research plan and schedule.
- The relevance of their research, including alignment with the Decadal Plan and its potential contribution to addressing societal, economic or environmental challenges; and
- Evidence of initiative, independent thinking and emerging research capability, including contributions to the research environment such as collaboration, peer support, mentoring or engagement activities, where applicable.
- For the Public Engagement with Science category, applicants in any field of study will be assessed on their experience, interest, or awareness in sharing research with the public. This may include early efforts to explain research to non-academia audiences, participation in outreach or science communication activities, involvement in community or school-based projects, or consideration of how public engagement could be incorporated into future work. The panel will look at the kinds of activities you have undertaken or are interested in, the audiences you have engaged with or hope to engage, and how you make your research understandable and relevant to wider public.

Value of the awards

R70 000 for a master's degree (x7) | R90 000 for PhD degree (x7)

Required documents:

i. **A completed Application Form** ([download here](#)).

ii. **Letter of Support from Supervisor**

The supervisor must know the nominee's work. This letter should outline the quality of and performance of the applicant's studies and their suitability to receive the award. Supervisors are encouraged to comment, where possible, on the applicant's research capabilities, initiative and independence, their development over time as well as any relevant contextual factors that may have influenced their academic trajectory.

iii. **Full Academic Record**

iv. **Certified Copies of Qualifications**

v. **Certified Copy of ID**

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

UCT internal review

Applicants who want to submit their applications for **internal review** must submit fully completed forms in MS Word format by **Monday, 11 May 2026** to amanda.raman@uct.ac.za.

Direct submission to DSTI

Applicants who wish to submit directly to the DSTI can submit by the deadline on **Sunday, 31 May 2026** to sawisa@dsti.gov.za and Cc' Amanda.Raman@uct.ac.za and clearly indicate the category. Late applications will be rejected.

DOWNLOAD APPLICATION FORMS

Application Form for [Young Women and Women Researchers](#)

Application Form for students [DSTI Fellowships](#)

NB: Only shortlisted finalists will be contacted. If you do not receive any communication from DSTI by the end of July, please consider your application unsuccessful.