

Call for Applications

NWU Innovation Fellowship Programme 2023

Application Deadline: Wednesday, 31 May 2023 at 11:59 AM

Programme Overview

What is the NWU Innovation Fellowship Programme?

The NWU Innovation Fellowship Programme (Innovation Fellowship) is an initiative of the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support (TTIS) office, which provides an opportunity for early-career researchers and academics of North-West University (NWU) to enhance their innovation skills and business acumen whilst working on their own innovations or social impact solutions, which they are creators or co-creators of. The programme further enables the Innovation Fellows to accelerate the commercial readiness or impact implementation readiness of the innovations or social impact solutions they have developed. The Innovation Fellowship achieves these aspects by providing financial resources and non-financial support to the Innovation Fellows so that they can personally and directly work on commercialisation tasks for their projects, such as concept advancement, identification and protection of intellectual property (IP), customer development, market assessments, mapping out of route to market, impact implementation strategies, business case development and other related activities as applicable.

What are the objectives of the Innovation Fellowship?

The grand goal of the Innovation Fellowship is to bolster innovative thinking and to build a new cohort of NWU researchers and innovators that is focussed developing solutions with a broad societal impact or market relevance. The sub-objectives of the programme are to:

- promote skills development and capacity building in innovation through hands-on experience, training and mentorship.
- accelerate the commercial readiness or impact implementation readiness of NWU home-grown innovations and solutions.
- incentivise and encourage NWU early-career researchers and academics across all disciplines to embark on research and innovation for developing solutions that address unsolved problems or unmet market needs.

How does the Innovation Fellowship work?

The funding under the programme pays for a portion of the Innovation Fellows' working time, based on current NWU salary rate, during which they can work on the advancement of the commercial readiness or impact implementation readiness of the innovations or social impact solutions. Innovation Fellows are expected to spend between 40% and 60% of their employment time (typically 2 to 3 days per week) working on the Innovation Fellowship deliverables for a continuous period of a minimum 3 months and maximum 6 months, which will be paid for under the programme. The TTIS office offers a working space at its premises for access by Innovation Fellows, for the duration of the programme. This option is intended to provide an environment away from regular lab or office setting, for the Innovation Fellows to focus on their activities pertaining to the Innovation Fellowship and to cultivate a close working relationship with their mentors and the TTIS team.

Fellowship Offering

What is provided under the Innovation Fellowship?

Two Innovation Fellowship awards of up to R270 000 each will be made for under the NWU Innovation Fellowship Programme 2023. The Innovation Fellowship award provides the following:

- Up to R200 000 for funding Innovation Fellow's time in order to spend up 60% of work time on improving the commercial readiness or impact implementation readiness of their innovations or social impact solutions.
- R50 000 for covering project costs for the chosen innovation such as product or process development, field studies or tests, prototype enhancements, concept piloting, market sample production and market trials/testing.
- R20 000 towards a short course on a topic in entrepreneurship/business management/innovation management or a theme closely related to the Innovation Fellow's innovation; alternatively, the amount is be used towards article processing charges for a journal article pertaining to the innovation (on condition that a provisional patent application is filed).
- Dedicated working space at the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support (TTIS) office for the duration of the fellowship.
- Allocation of a senior team member of TTIS office as a mentor.

Eligibility

Who can apply?

- The Innovation Fellowship is suitable for applicants who are already working on an innovation or solution (product or service) that is addressing an unsolved problem and has a demonstrable commercial potential or social impact. At the time of application, the proof of concept must have already been achieved and supported by evidence of implementation.
- Applicants must have interest in undertaking project activities required for improving the commercial readiness or impact implementation readiness of their innovation and be willing to commit working time towards such activities.
- The Innovation Fellowship is open to early-career individuals who are employed at NWU as academics and researchers (including research assistants and post-doctoral fellows). Individuals will be considered to be in their early career if they completed their first undergraduate degree in the last 12 years.
- Only candidates who are employed by the NWU on a permanent or fixed-term basis may apply. Non-employees (students, alumni and individuals external to NWU) are not eligible.
- Applicants must have the support and permission of the line managers or supervisors.
- Candidates from all NWU faculties are encouraged to apply.

Application process

How to apply?

- Potential applicants are advised to first discuss the intention to submit the fellowship application with their line managers or supervisors to obtain support.
- Appropriate Application form for the NWU Innovation Fellowship must be filled in and all sections, including applicant signature be completed. (Application forms may be requested from TTIS office).
- The line manager or supervisor must then complete the relevant sections and annotate signature on the application to indicate support and approval for submission.
- Completed and signed fellowship application forms are to be submitted by email to mesuli.mbanjwa@nwu.ac.za, with the subject line: NWU Innovation Fellowship 2023.

When to apply?

- The call for applications opened on 24 April 2023 and will close on **31 May 2023 at 11.59 AM**.
- All applications must be received on the provided email by the deadline above.
- Late and/or incomplete applications will not be considered.
- Applications not signed/approved by line managers or supervisors will be taken as incomplete and, thus, not considered.

Selection process

Evaluation criteria

- Successful applicants will have demonstrated three critical aspects:
 - 1) The candidate fellow must be working on an innovative solution (product or service) that is addressing an unsolved problem and has a demonstrable commercial potential. At the time of application, the proof of concept must have been already achieved and be demonstrated/proven in the application. The IP in the innovation must that falling within the scope of NWU IP Policy on ownership (*i.e.*, it must be NWU-owned).
 - 2) Strong interest of the candidate fellow in undertaking commercialisation related work and high motivation for driving her/his innovation towards the market or impact implementation.
 - 3) Capacity in terms of time availability for committing to the fellowship requirements and activities for the full duration. Support of the line manager or supervisor will be essential for the selection.
- Fellows will be required to make a formal innovation disclosure of the innovation and its commercial potential to the TTIS office.

Shortlisting & Interviews

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to participate in interview by the Innovation Fellowship committee. The interviews will take place in person on 08 June 2023 at the TTIS offices. Candidates will be advised of their interview timeslots at the time of shortlisting notification. Following the interview process two successful candidates will be selected and awarded the Innovation Fellowship.

Timelines

- 24 April 2023 Call for applications opens
- 31 May 2023 Deadline for applications
- 05 June 2023 Notification of shortlist and invitation to interview
- 07 June 2023 Interviews of shortlisted candidates (In-person)
- 14 June 2023 Notification of successful candidates
- 17 June 2023 Acceptance of Fellowship offer letters
- 29 June 2023 Finalisation and signing off of workplans and budgets
- 03 July 2023 Commencement of Innovation Fellowship

Contact Details

All enquiries regarding the NWU Innovation Fellowship Programme may be directed Dr Mesuli Mbanjwa at the Technology Transfer and innovation Support office

Email: mesuli.mbanjwa@nwu.ac.za, Tel: (018) 299 4902.

Communication date: 24 April 2023