

Siyaphumelela Network 2020-2022:

Request for Proposals to Become a Partner Institution

This Request for Proposals to become a Partner Institution in the future Siyaphumelela Network sets out to describe the vision of the Network, the role of the Partner Institutions, applicant commitments, requirements for the proposal and the selection process.

Overview

Partner Institutions are central to the vision of the future Siyaphumelela Network. Their key roles are to:

- Implement or expand evidence-based decision-making processes to support institutional leadership, student support and faculty management to improve throughput rates (time to completion) and the removal of performance disparities among different racial and gender categories at their institution
- Develop and offer at least one service (approaches, resources and tools) to improve student success for their own institution and for the wider Siyaphumelela Network
- Play a leadership role in regional sub-networks to share insights into and learn how to better support student success regionally.

Vision of the Siyaphumelela Network

The future of Siyaphumelela will include a number of services developed and supported by Partner Institutions (Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria, and University of the Witwatersrand), in collaboration and supported by the backbone organisation (*Saide*), regional and national networks (Eastern Cape, Central, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern and Southern Gauteng) to build capacity across the South African higher education sectors. Important national role players, such as DHET, CHE and USAf, will play a supporting and advising role through the Siyaphumelela Advisory Committee. A number of possible funders, including the Kresge Foundation, will support the work of the future Siyaphumelela Network. The relationships between these components is represented below (Fig. 1).

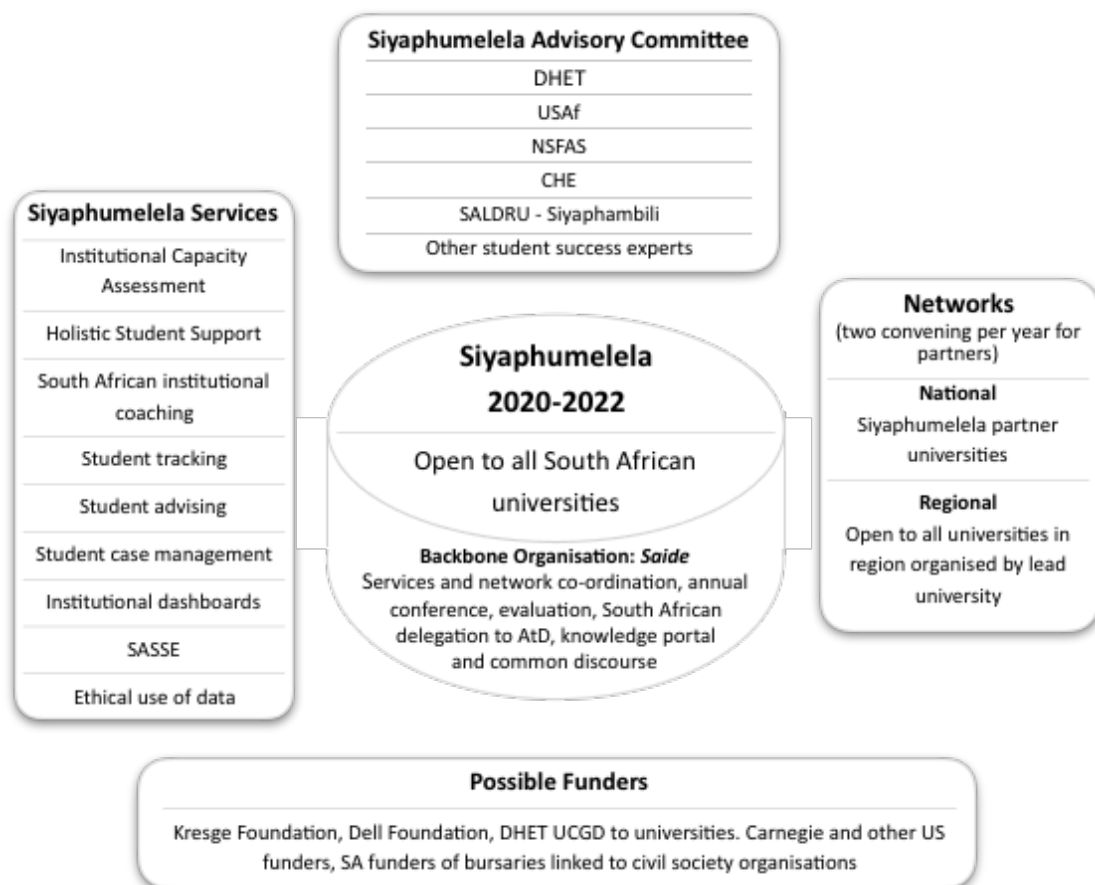


Figure 1. Components of the Siyaphumelela Network

All South African higher education institutions are eligible to make proposals for funding as described below. This request is competitive and only those proposals deemed to meet the roles described above will be considered for funding (US\$ 100 000 pa for three years).

Background

From 2009 to 2012, the National Planning Commission under the Presidency undertook a comprehensive process to analyse what needs to be done to eradicate poverty in South Africa by 2030. On this basis, it developed the *National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work*. The Plan repeatedly argues that improving education outcomes throughout the education system is one of the highest priorities over the next 18 years.¹

It recommends increasing dramatically both access (70% increase in enrolments over 18 years), and success (increasing throughput for degree programmes to more than 75%). It suggests that central to achieving these targets is the need to create a learning and research environment welcoming to all. It proposes that extra support should be offered to those from poor schooling environments (see p. 319-320).

The subsequent White Paper on Post-School Education and Training² takes up the theme:

¹ National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it work, 2012, p 133.

² White Paper on Post-School Education and Training, 2013, p 32

Improving student access, success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge for the university sector and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves.

This (low throughput rate) not only raises serious concerns about the productivity of the system and the high costs to government and institutions from poor student success rates, but also raises substantial equity issues. Despite the overall demographic changes in the student bodies of universities, cohort studies have shown that black students, particularly those from poor backgrounds, are still most affected by poor graduation and throughput rates. The relationship between equity of access and equity of outcomes must therefore continue to be a substantive area of focus (pp.32 -33).

These concerns were reiterated by the then Minister of Higher Education and Training, the honourable Naledi Pandor, at Siyaphumelela's fourth national conference in 2018:

South African students "who are inadequately funded experience great challenges in regard to food security, suitable accommodation, and ability to obtain textbooks and other resources... ..These tend to be poor black working-class students and we need to develop models of funding and support that address their needs."³

South African student success challenges include institutional practices, access to resources, teaching and learning pedagogies, food security, transportation, accommodation, language, and academic under-preparation.

Against this background, over the past five years, the Kresge Foundation has funded the five university-Siyaphumelela Initiative,⁴ which has sought to improve student success through exploring the use of data analytics to build institutional capacity to collect and analyse student data and integrate it with institutional research, information technology, academic development, planning and academic divisions. It encompassed planning at an institutional level and is striving to make institutional interventions rather than 'boutique' ones.

In particular, the Kresge Foundation Siyaphumelela funding aimed to:

1. Improve capacity to collect student data and integrate it with Institutional Research, Information Communication Technology, academic development, student services, planning and academic divisions.
2. Create South African models of universities using successful data analytics to improve student outcomes.
3. Create greater awareness and support for evidence to improve student success in South Africa.
4. Create and highlight a shared vocabulary and consensus on especially effective practices to improve student success.
5. Enlarge the cadre of experienced institutional researchers versed in data analytics to support student success.

Siyaphumelela's activities sought to effect positive social and organisational change in higher education to drive student success and to create beneficial relations between universities and other role players, such as governmental entities.

³ Opening Address to the Siyaphumela Conference, 2018

⁴ Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand.

Overall, the long-term student success trends facing South African universities have been positive, albeit uneven. Cohort analyses in Figure 1, below, show that successive cohorts of students have improved their throughput rates in each of minimum time, minimum time plus one year (M+1) and minimum time plus two years (M+2).

However, despite the improvement, far too small a proportion of students are completing in minimum time and minimum time plus 1. Students taking longer to complete their credentials delay their entry into employment, risk higher indebtedness and, in a constrained system, prevent other students from entering the system. This lack of efficiency in the system has been cited as one of the reasons that Treasury had failed to increase the higher education budget adequately. Given the target of 75% throughput set by the National Development Plan, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has now set M+1 as a cut-off for students to receive bursaries. While there has been a large increase in completion rates for Black, Indian and Coloured students over the past ten years, race gaps remain with the rate of white students obtaining their qualifications being higher than other student groups. Another concern is the performance of male students. For each of three cohorts, female students outperform their male counterparts and, more alarmingly, that gap is growing, reaching ten percentage points for the 2015 cohort after three years.

Siyaphumelela Initiative Outcomes: 2015-2019

Over the past five years the Siyaphumelela Initiative achieved most of its initial outcomes. It has built a student success culture, identified data and tools to improve student success, strengthened institutional capacity and developed policy and practices for long-term student success. These are briefly described in relation to culture, data and tools, capacity development, and policy and practices (Fig. 2, below).

Culture

- Greater recognition to the importance of student success both within the five partner institutions (student success as a strategic objective) and nationally (inclusion of student indicators in grant applications).
- Development of evidence-based decision-making processes for leadership, student support and faculty management.
- Inter- and intra-collaboration supported collective problem-solving, sharing of techniques, development of joint data-orientated projects (pilots), capacity development and the development of social capital and trust.

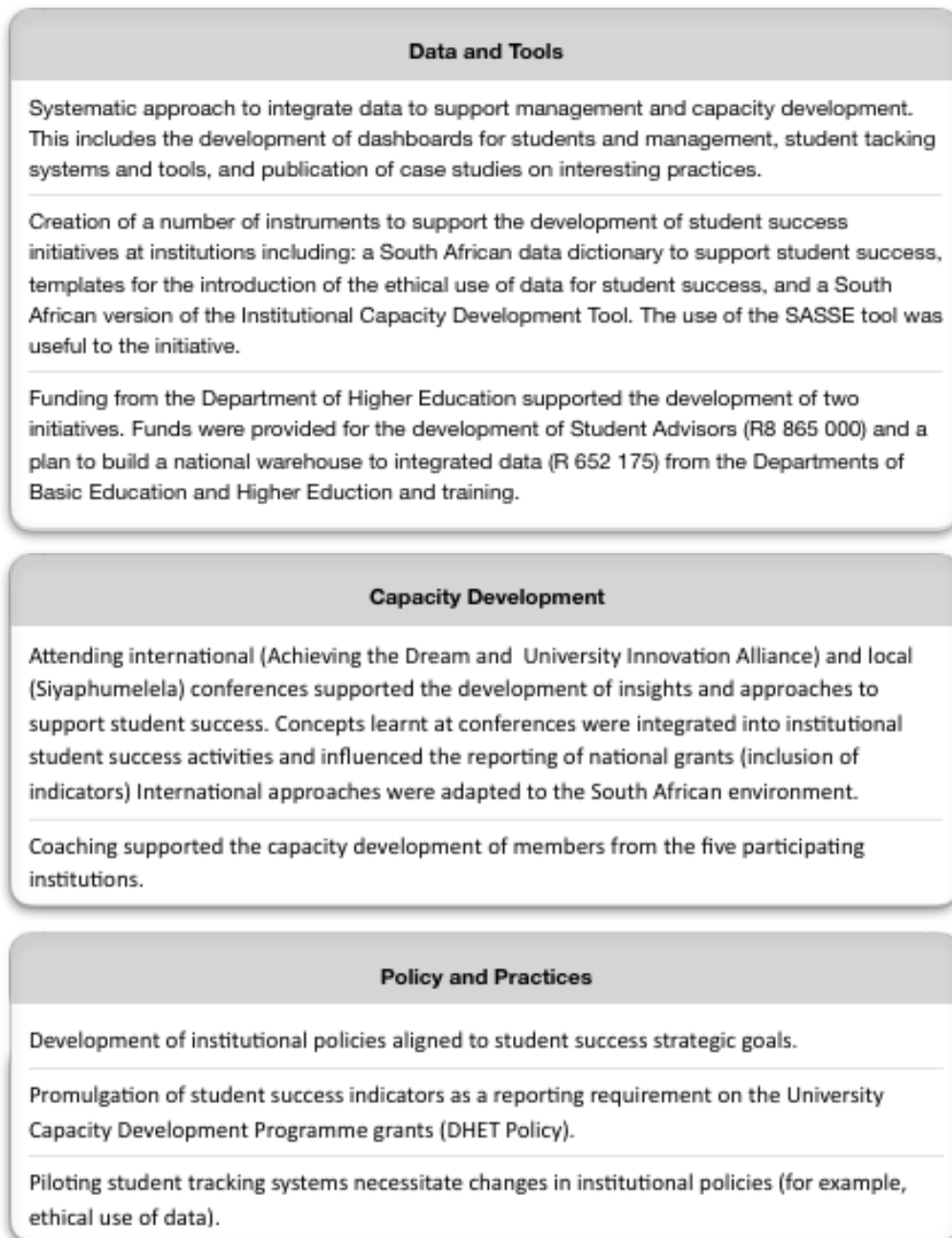


Figure 2. Siyaphumelela outcomes, approaches, tools and processes (2015-2019)

One of the goals of the initiative was to have institutions develop a common language and set of experiences around student success so that it would be easier to compare practices. Before Siyaphumelela, South African student success discussions have often been vague. It was often difficult to compare practices and approaches because the same terms at one institution might mean radically different practices at another, or very different terms might be referring to the same activities or issues. Participation in Achieving the Dream’s annual conference, DREAM, along with the annual Siyaphumelela conference, helped to reinforce shared practices, terms and understandings so that the original cohort could easily compare practices – and influence national definitions.

Similarly, although not explicitly identified in the original initiative design, one of the primary outcomes reported by the Siyaphumelela partners has been the trust that

developed among them, which allowed the universities to share, collaborate and build social capital. Instead of working in isolation on similar problems, this social capital helped the universities to be transparent and candid about the challenges they face, both as individual institutions and as a group, as they pursued student success. It also allowed campuses to look at common solutions with a shared understanding so that they could better see what works most effectively.

Indeed, Siyaphumelela did more than just build trust and consolidate terminology and interventions. In particular, one of the unintended outcomes has been a change in government funding policies. In 2018 DHET introduced the R900 million University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) aimed at enhancing development initiatives at universities. As a result of their exposure to Siyaphumelela and the annual DREAM conference, which emphasize clear success metrics, DHET now requires that institutional grant reports include a multiplicity of objective student success indicators.

In addition, current Siyaphumelela partners developed new insights into student success initiatives through the engagements with a wide range of organisations including DHET, Department of Basic Education, CHE, Achieving the Dream, University Innovation Alliance, USAf, SAAIR and SALDRU.

Design of a Future Siyaphumelela Initiative: Siyaphumelela Network (2020-2022)

Introduction

The future Siyaphumelela Network builds on the expertise, tools and insights developed over the past five years by the original participating universities (Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Free State, Nelson Mandela and Durban University of Technology), the backbone organisation (*Saide*) and associated organisations. It also responds to the concerns raised by the Minister of Higher Education and Training at the 2018 Siyaphumelela Conference around ensuring that any future initiative should include as many as possible of the other universities in South Africa, particularly those previously disadvantaged, to scale this work nationally.⁵

The question is: With limited resources, how do we successfully retain the degree of excellence, innovation and trust that we have built over the past five years while expanding nationally, and how do we ensure long-term viability of the Siyaphumelela Network?

To address these concerns, for its next phase Siyaphumelela will support the existing five grantees, now termed Siyaphumelela partners, to continue their student success leadership while providing opportunities for the remaining 21 universities to build their student success capacity, or to begin their student success journeys. This approach includes both a geographic component with the Siyaphumelela partner universities supporting a **regional network** with other institutions within their region, and a **services model** where the services will be offered by Siyaphumelela partner universities, *Saide*, other South African universities who have developed expertise in student success, USAf, and USA partners introduced to Siyaphumelela through the Kresge Foundation. These include Achieving the Dream, Georgia State University, and the University Innovation Alliance. The services will use openly licensed

⁵ <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/pandor-highlights-funding-as-barrier-to-student-success-15444369>

resources, tools and practices to expand and develop student success across South Africa in what we hope will ensure its long-term financial sustainability and better student outcomes. A **national network** will continue with the Siyaphumelela partners meeting twice yearly to share developments at their universities and to reflect on the services being offered.

Purpose and Goals for the Siyaphumelela Network

Given the lessons learned from our experiences, our formal evaluation and our consultation with existing and potential partners, to catalyse student success across the South African higher education system, the goals of the Siyaphumelela Network are therefore similar to, and build from, the original goals:

1. Establish a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student completion rates and reduce equity differences among race and gender
2. Elevate and expand South African models of universities using successful data analytics to improve student outcomes on a large scale
3. Improve institutional capacity to collect student data and integrate it with IR, ICT, academic development, student services, planning and academic divisions to improve student success throughout South Africa's higher education system, including the creation of a local cadre of experienced institutional researchers and data coaches versed in data analytics to support student success
4. Expand evidence-based student success efforts on a national scale, using a networked approach that builds on existing strengths, shares capacity throughout the system, and serves institutions based on their current needs and abilities
5. Increase data transparency and accessibility within institutions and across the South African higher education system, including annual objective institutional numerical goals and benchmarks set in partnership with *Saide* and funders.

Components of the Siyaphumelela Network

The network, to support student success, rests on two main components: the development and support of services (resources and tools) offered across the network, and regional sub-networks supported by a co-ordinating backbone organisation in order to benefit all South African higher education institutions.

Services

A coherent suite of services will be available to all Siyaphumelela universities. In consultation with Siyaphumelela partners and other institutions, services include:

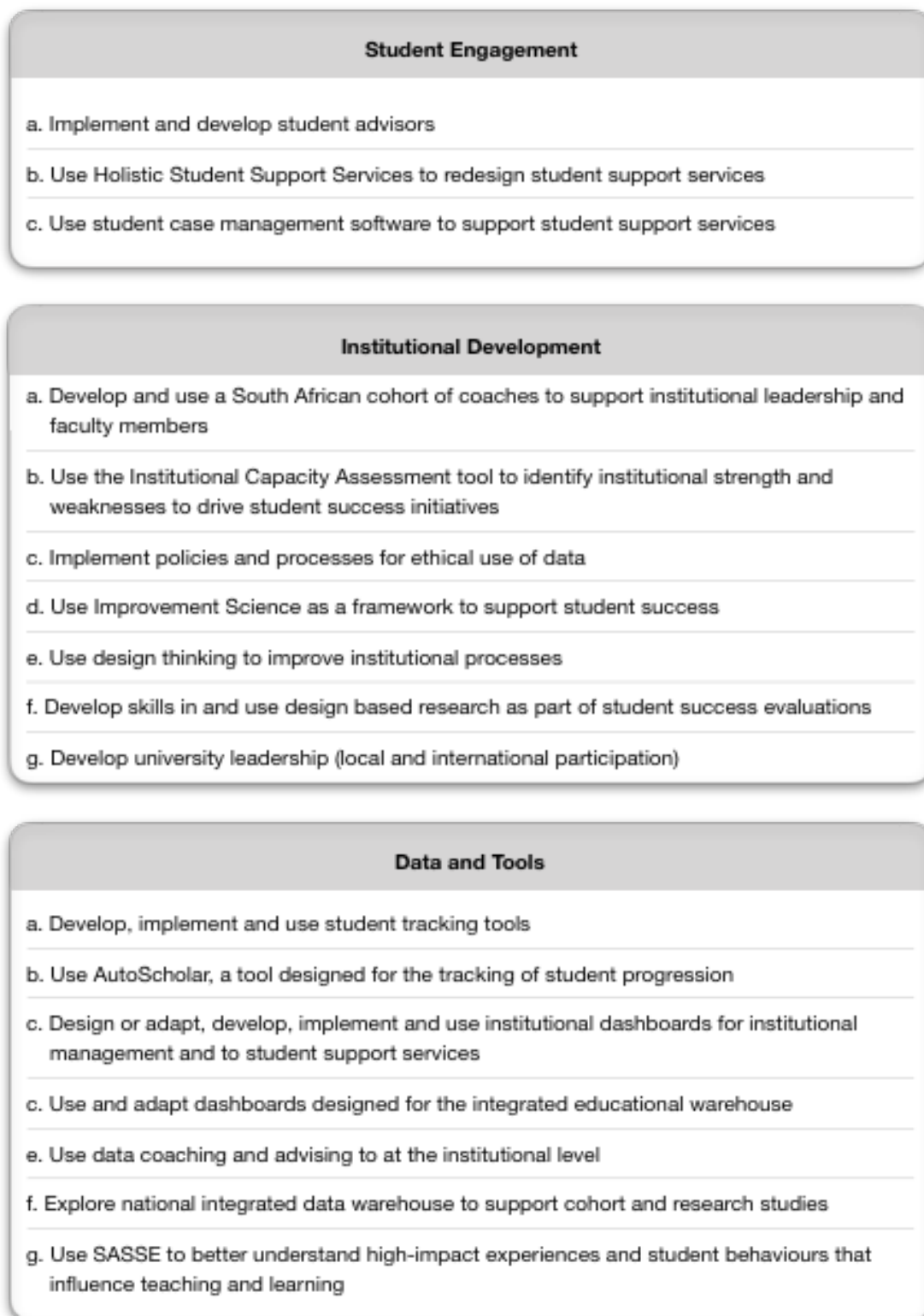


Figure 3. Services for the Siyaphumelela Network.

Current partners, other higher education partners (including universities, SALDRU, SAAIR, USAf, DHET, CHE), international partners (ATD, UIA, Kresge Foundation) and *Saide* (as the backbone institution) will provide the services.

One of the key components of this model is support from Achieving the Dream to train South African coaches for local needs and to explore with us the use of ATD's

toolkit for the holistic redesign of advising and student services to support every student effectively. Also, partnerships built with other international institutions are of importance, such as Georgia State University, which is developing a National Institute for Student Success, and the UIA.

The current Siyaphumelela partners will be supported administratively by *Saide* to provide workshops and professional development services to other South African universities (while continuing with their institutional development endeavours). This administrative support would also be extended to services provided by the other partners mentioned above.

Networks

Developing networks⁶ is important to share insights and learn how to support student success better regionally (by leveraging local leaders in student success) and nationally to help set a national agenda and co-ordinate and integrate the local networks. For the regional networks (Eastern Cape, Central, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern and Southern Gauteng and the proposed Western Cape regional network), six leader institutions will co-ordinate and provide support to local institutions to enhance student success. The sub-network leader organisation will be selected from the successful applicants. It is important to stress that the proposed Network is not a membership organisation.

Participation

There are three possible ways to participate in the Siyaphumelela Network going forward:

- **Partner Institutions** will play a leading role in the development of new tools for their own institution and for the system, lead and support development of a regional network, provide services, and make use of and learn from other services.
- **Associate Institutions** will provide services or support both activities. In addition, they make use of and learn from other services.
- **Participant Institutions** will be more developmental in their orientation and will contribute to regional networks and make use of services to develop their institutions.

Subscriptions fees for all participants will be the same (R150 000 p.a.).

All Siyaphumelela institutions will receive:

- Coaching from local coaches on how best to manage and use data analytics for student success (except the original 2015 to 2019 Siyaphumelela Partner Institutions: Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand).
- Opportunities for staff to participate in international conferences on student success, such as Achieving the Dream.
- Opportunities to meet as a group on a semester basis to compare notes and experiences, plus group network meetings at the annual DREAM and Siyaphumelela conferences.

⁶ Anderson, B. D., & Vongpanitlerd, S. (2013). *Network analysis and synthesis: a modern systems theory approach*. Courier Corporation.

- Opportunities to participate in an annual conference on student success that brings together institutional researchers, academic developers, student advisors and university leadership to discuss innovations and challenges in South Africa and worldwide on student success.
- Opportunities for Institutional researchers, academic developers, student advisors and university leadership for training and professional development, through participation in workshops focussed on the services outlined above.

Request for Participation

Any South African public university headquartered in South Africa that is not under administrative review or oversight is eligible to apply.

Applicant commitments

In responding under this RFP to become a Partner Institution, the Institution must:

- Commit to developing annual goals for student success by improving the following indicators (and, within these indicators, remove differences based on race, gender and school quintile):
 - First year retention to second year, based on entering cohort.
 - Course success rates of undergraduate study as defined as the completed full-time equivalents expressed as a percentage of the enrolled full-time equivalents.
 - Qualification completion rates within minimum time plus one or two years.

Subsequent tranches will be conditional on reporting against these targets.

- Commit to the following institutional practices:
 - Examining institutional practices that may be inhibiting student success (topics might include, but are not limited to, admissions, financial aid, academic support, non-academic support, academic advising, first-year experience, developmental math or English, student services, etc.).
 - Scaling-up student success efforts across the university based on evaluation and other evidence of effectiveness.
 - Strengthening and integrating data analytics in institutional research, information and communications technology, academic development, planning and academic divisions.
 - Using data analytics to review the high impact modules in which students fail, withdraw, or receive otherwise unsatisfactory grades to identify opportunities to improve student success, and implement these.
 - Establish a broadly representative student success committee or task force (if not already in-place) comprising representatives of institutional research, information and communications technology, academic development, student services, planning, academic divisions, students, and a senior member of the university's executive team.
- Commit to fully participating in activities of the network, including sharing data and experiences with other grantees on student success.
- Agree that the institution's Vice-Chancellor or appropriate Deputy Vice-Chancellor will attend the annual student success conference.
- Lead or support a Siyaphumelela regional network that shares insights and learns how to support student success better.

- Provide services to the Siyaphumelela Network to build capacity in particular areas.
- Develop new tools and processes for the Siyaphumelela Network.
- Integrate a robust methodology to measure the impact of initiatives supported by Improvement Science ideals and make use of approaches such as Design Based Research and Design Thinking.
- Provide required reports and participate in evaluation and dissemination activities within the Network.
- Except for the original 2015 to 2019 Siyaphumelela Partner Institutions (Durban University of Technology, Nelson Mandela University, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand) use the SASSE tool to assess student engagement.

Requirements for the Concept Document

Final selection will be based on the quality of concept papers submitted, how realistic the plans outlined are, and the demonstrated commitment of university leadership to the goal of improving student success using integrated data analytics. Please ensure that your institution submits a single Concept Document.

Successful six-page Concept Documents must include a narrative that addresses the areas listed below.

1. Institutional Profile: This is a summary of the institution within the South African higher education system and its responses to the challenges surrounding student success. The applicant should give a brief introduction to the university and a candid assessment of the challenges it faces regarding student success given its own unique context in a differentiated higher education system. Recommended length: One to two pages that could include:

- A brief history, any history of mergers, current institutional profile (research university, university of technology, comprehensive university, etc.), number of faculties or schools, whether any programs are non-contact (and what percentage of students are in such programs), and notable programs, institutional distinctiveness or challenges.
- A discussion of the profile of enrolled students, including the total number of students (disaggregated by race and gender), admitted students' admission point scores, the percentage from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds (and how that is defined), the percentage of first-generation university students, the percentage of students in university-sponsored residence halls and throughput numbers for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.
- The amount and duration of support the university has sought from the DHET's University Capacity Development Grant, and the specific activities the university is undertaking to meet the requirements of other funding entities, and the university itself, to support student success.

2. Strategic Vision and Leadership Commitment to Participating in the Siyaphumelela Network: This provides an opportunity for the applicant's vision for building a coherent and institution-wide agenda and strategy for student success and for how the institution proposes to support the Siyaphumelela Network. In addition to a cover letter from the institution's Vice Chancellor requesting support, this section should describe what Executive Management, including the Vice Chancellor, has done to date to improve student success and their strategic vision for improving

student success in the future. Recommended length: One to two pages that could include:

- An outline of the overall institutional goals for the university including how student success fits into this broader vision, and a discussion of the Vice Chancellor's commitment to the improvement of student success over the next three years.
- A discussion of what the university feels are the most significant challenges to student success at its institution, and how these challenges have been identified, including a discussion and analysis of student cohort success data.
- A discussion of how participating in this initiative could benefit the institution and the broader Siyaphumelela Network.
- The identification of existing services which the institution could offer to support the Siyaphumelela network and a description of new services that the institution proposes to develop for the institution and the Siyaphumelela Network.
- Information on how the institution proposes to support both the sub- and national networks.
- The use of open licence approaches to support the development of tools for the wider Siyaphumelela network.
- A cover Letter from your Vice-Chancellor confirming their commitment to the Siyaphumelela Network and its requirements, and availability for in-person and/or virtual site visits between 11 and 22 November 2019.

3. Integration Plan and Stakeholder Agreement: How an institution would use this grant opportunity to make improvements to its data collection tools that can be of value to other institutions to support student success. Applicants should plan taking into consideration the timelines and activities suggested below (Table 1, below). The inclusion of indicators to monitor institutional development for student success need to be clearly articulated. Recommended length: One to two pages that could ideally discuss:

- How it might enhance the way typically disconnected information and communications technology, institutional research, academic development, student services, planning and academic units work together to improve student success and what incentives it might employ.
- What structures it has put in place to oversee student success and include an analysis of its accomplishments and how it proposes to move forward in this regard.
- How the university proposes to incorporate student views and voices into this work (this might include participation on a university student success task force, focus groups with students when evaluating high failure courses, etc.)
- How the university would sustain changes that might occur during the life of the grant after it has been completed.
- How the university would use data analytics to review its own top-10 high failure rate courses to see if there are opportunities to better enhance student success.

Institutions must ensure to include agreement to all the commitments outlined in Applicant Commitments above in the Concept Document they submit.

Requirements for the full proposal will be circulated when the finalists have been selected.

Proposal and Selection Process

RFP Released: September 2019

Initial Concept Papers Submitted: 21 October 2019

Invitations sent to finalists for full proposals: 8 November 2019

Site visits to finalists: 11 – 18 November 2019

Finalists proposals submitted: 9 December 2019

Grant recommendations made: January/February 2020

Funding Decisions Announced: 1 March 2020

First Grant Payment: March 2020

Selection Criteria

Final selection will be based on the quality of concept papers submitted, how realistic the plans outlined are, and the demonstrated commitment of university leadership to the goal of improving student success using integrated data analytics.

Submission

To submit your concept paper please visit:

<https://www.siyaphumelela.org.za/rfp/partners/>

Table 1. Planning and management for Siyaphumelela Network New Partners and Participant Members

| Activity | 2020 | | | 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2022 | | | 2023 | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------|------|---|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|---|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | J | F | |
| Goal 1. Assessment (baseline) and Planning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Coaching | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Sub-network | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - ICAT | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Gateway courses identification | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Student Success Committee | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Institutional Researchers development | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Planning on interventions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Reporting including implementation plan | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 2. Implementation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Coaching | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Sub-network | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Student Advisory and/or Student Holistic Support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Exploring use of data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Institutional Researchers development | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Reporting including student success initiatives | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goal 3. Evaluation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Coaching | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Sub-network | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Student Advisory and/or Student Holistic Support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Exploring use of data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Reporting including evidence of the use of data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Consolidation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Coaching | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Sub-network | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Student Advisory and/or Student Holistic Support | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Exploring use of data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| - Reporting including evidence of the use of data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |