

HOW WE ADJUDICATE APPLICATIONS

A step-by-step guide to the DNTF funding process

The DNTF is a partnership between Google and the Association of Independent Publishers, administered by Tshikululu Social Investments. The Fund provides project-based grants and capacity building to strengthen digital operations, audience development, and financial resilience among South Africa's independent news publishers.

Every application goes through a structured, transparent process. This fact sheet explains each stage so you know exactly what to expect.

The Adjudication Process

1

Call for Applications

- Tshikululu publishes the call for applications on the DNTF website: dntfund.org.za.
- The call includes deadlines, eligibility requirements, and application guidelines.
- Applications are invited across four funding categories: Ignite (Build sub-tier), Build, Grow, and Engage.

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Submission

- Applications are submitted via Google Forms during the published application window.
- Both for-profit and non-profit organisations may apply, provided they meet the Fund's eligibility criteria.
- A complete submission includes: a completed application form, Press Council membership, proof of registration, founding documents, governance confirmation, tax compliance PIN, and financial documentation.

3

Initial Screening

- Tshikululu reviews every submission for completeness and eligibility.
- Incomplete applications are declined, and applicants receive reasons for rejection.

4

Independent Adjudication

- Eligible applications are assessed by an independent Adjudication Committee using a 100-point scoring matrix. The weightings differ by tier to reflect what is expected at each stage.
- Each committee member scores independently. Weighted scores are averaged to produce a composite score.
- Committee members are selected for their expertise in journalism, digital innovation, media business development, or grant-making.
- Members must declare any conflicts of interest and recuse themselves from scoring relevant applications. Names and bios of committee members are published on the Fund website.

5

Recommendation

- The Adjudication Committee issues funding recommendations in ranked order of composite score.
- Tie-break criteria apply in sequence: impact and sustainability score; feasibility and readiness score; organisational capacity and governance score; equity priorities.
- Recommendations are documented and archived for audit and transparency.

6

Board Ratification

- Funding recommendations are submitted to the DNTF Oversight and Advisory Board for ratification.
- The Board does not interfere in individual funding decisions except in exceptional, documented circumstances.
- Approved applicants are notified following Board ratification.

7

Contracting

- Approved applicants proceed to the contracting stage.
- No grant funding is paid until a formal grant agreement has been signed between the applicant and Tshikululu Social Investments.
- Funds are disbursed strictly in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement.

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Monitoring and Reporting

- Grant recipients submit monthly progress reports, financial reports, and a comprehensive impact report upon completion.
- Grants above R950,000 require audited financial statements.
- Tshikululu conducts periodic reviews and site visits. Project outcomes may be shared publicly as case studies.
- Recipients must report on ethical use of AI where applicable.

How Applications are Scored

All eligible applications are assessed against a 100-point matrix across eight criteria. The weightings differ by tier, reflecting different expectations at each stage. Ignite and Build prioritise mission alignment and feasibility. Grow balances these with innovation and revenue. Engage places the greatest weight on innovation and sustainability.

Criterion	Ignite	Build	Grow	Engage
Alignment with DNTF Objectives	25	22	18	15
Innovation & Use of Technology	8	10	15	18
Sustainability & Revenue Potential	8	10	15	18
Feasibility & Readiness	18	16	14	12
Organisational Capacity & Governance	12	12	10	10
Audience Reach & Engagement	12	12	10	10

Criterion	Ignite	Build	Grow	Engage
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Impact	12	10	10	10
Impact & Learning Potential	5	8	8	7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

All applications must also demonstrate editorial independence and appropriate safeguards for AI usage where necessary.

Funding Tiers

Projects may be funded up to the maximum per tier, per project, per year, for up to three years. Multi-year funding is subject to annual review and the availability of funds.

Tier	Who it's for	Maximum grant
Ignite <i>(Build sub-tier)</i>	Active publishers with no digital presence or fewer than 5,000 monthly unique digital users, committed to digital transition	R100,000 per project
Build	Publishers with little or no digital presence, building a digital foundation	Up to R380,000 per year
Grow	Publishers with a basic digital product, looking to expand reach and capability	Up to R950,000 per year
Engage	Digitally mature publishers investing in advanced technologies and business models	Up to R1,900,000 per year

Transparency and Accountability

The DNTF is committed to openness at every stage of the process:

Our Commitments

- Names and bios of Adjudication Committee members are published on the Fund website.
- Data on funding decisions is made publicly available.
- A publicly accessible list of beneficiaries, funding amounts, and project details is maintained.
- All scoring records are retained and archived for audit purposes.
- Conflict-of-interest declarations and recusals are formally minuted.

Ready to Apply?

Visit dntfund.org.za to find open calls for applications, eligibility criteria, and application guidelines. For queries, contact us through the website.