



DIRISA SDC

STUDENT DATATHON CHALLENGE

DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge (SDC) 2026

Sponsorship Packages and Opportunities



science, technology
& innovation

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



CSIR

Touching lives through innovation

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	2
DATATHON CHALLENGES	5
WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANISATION SPONSOR THE DATATHON?	6
PAST THEMES AND SPONSORS	7
SUCCESS STORIES	8
IMPACT AND REACH	10
SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES	11

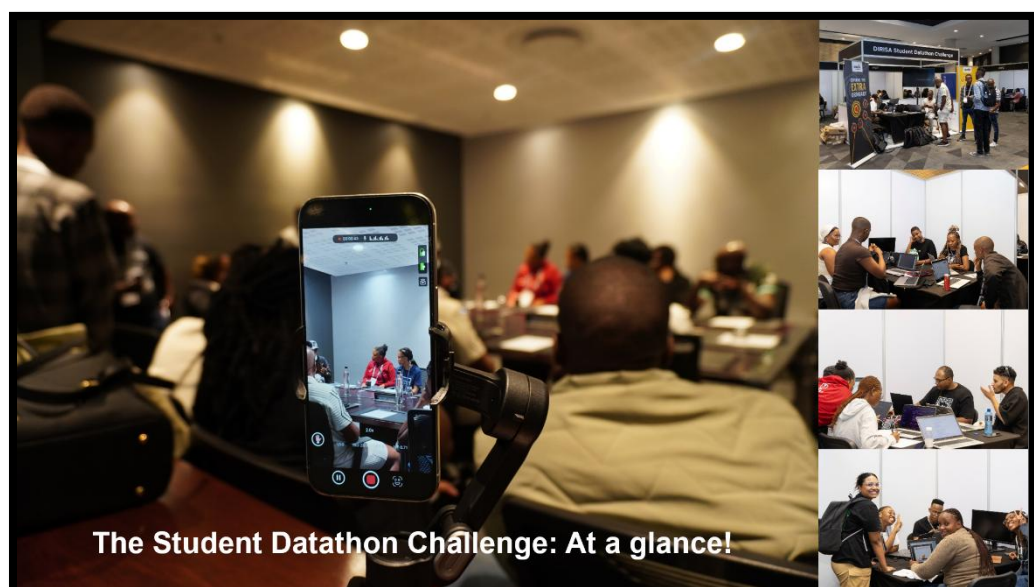
BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Data Intensive Research Initiative of South Africa (DIRISA) is one of the three pillars of the National Integrated Cyberinfrastructure System (NICIS). NICIS is a national initiative of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation implemented by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

A key objective of DIRISA is to foster the development of human capacity and the application of cyberinfrastructure to contribute to the transformation of the ICT sector. Towards the attainment of this objective, the DIRISA Student Datathon is a competition that aims to showcase how students from South African institutions can use data creatively and innovatively to develop software-based solutions across themes such as data sciences, artificial intelligence and other leading-edge technologies. This is done to contribute towards efforts aligned with solving priority and relevant South African Socio-Economic challenges.

This year DIRISA will be hosting its **8th Annual Datathon**. The DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge is aimed mainly at tertiary students but also has participation from high school students that are trained throughout the year to be able to participate at the same level as tertiary students.



The DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge timeline for 2026 is depicted in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1: DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge Timeline

The pre-qualifiers training focuses on introducing data science skills. The training program covers the main topics of the data science lifecycle such as:

- 🔗 Google colab using Python and pandas
- 🔗 Data cleaning, Data Exploration and Data visualization
- 🔗 Data modelling using both supervised and unsupervised models
- 🔗 Introduction to Natural Language Processing (NLP)
- 🔗 Problem Definition and Data Scraping

The aim of the training is to equip the students with the necessary knowledge needed to participate in the Datathon.

This training is followed by an individual qualifier which is in the form of a quiz. The top 6 students from each institutions are selected to form a team. These teams proceed to the team qualifiers phase in which they have to complete a prediction and forecasting task. The top 10 teams are then selected to proceed to the final datathon challenge.

During the datathon Finals, students are expected to work on their solutions using data. Solutions are presented and demonstrated by teams and are judged by a panel of judges. This day is usually attended by representatives of companies, government, and academic institutions.

2026 DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge

Dates: 30 Nov – 4 Dec 2026

Venue: TBC

DATATHON CHALLENGES

The datathon has two challenges:

Technical Challenge. This is the main datathon challenge in which students have to use data science skills to create forecasting and predictive models using machine learning and artificial intelligence. The students are also required to develop a solution for solving a societal problem through analysing data to create innovative data-driven solutions for an identified problem.



Research Challenge. The research challenge trains students to create posters and research papers based on the technical work that is conducted by the technical challenge team. The students have to follow the proper research methodology and lifecycle to produce research work.

WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANISATION SPONSOR THE DATATHON?

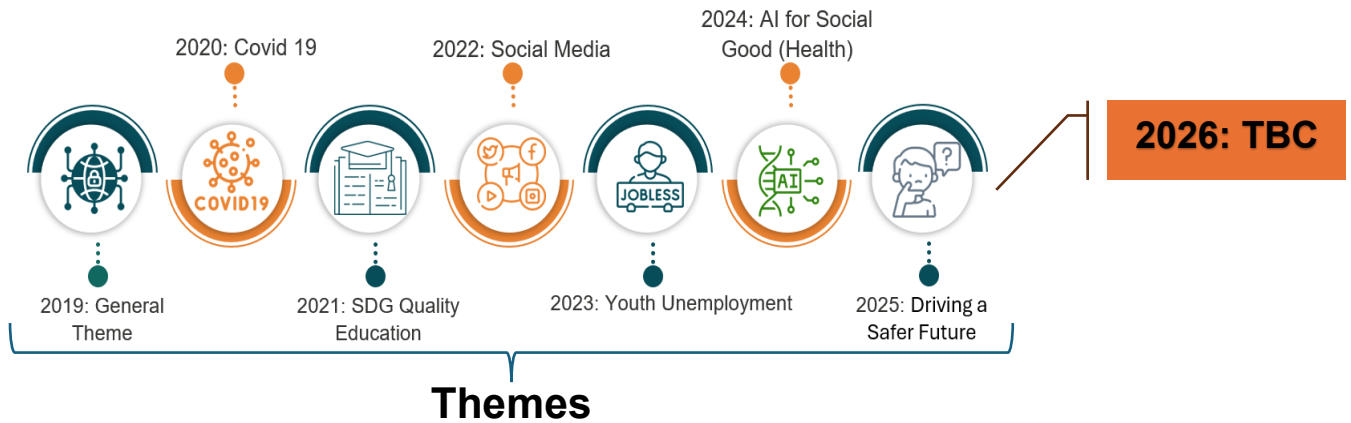
The DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge forms part of the NICIS National Student Competitions, a national platform for developing high-performance digital skills in Data Science, Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics, Research, Cybersecurity and High-Performance Computing. The event brings together approximately 160 attendees comprising 120 competing students, academics, industry experts, judges and government stakeholders.

This provides an excellent opportunity for organizations to increase their visibility and promote their offerings among South Africa's top emerging data science, AI, analytics, and research talent. Partner organizations can engage directly with participants, finalists, teams, mentors, judges, and participating institutions throughout the competition lifecycle. In turn enabling the creation of recruitment, internship, bursary, mentorship, and innovation partnership opportunities while demonstrating a clear commitment to transformation and socio-educational upliftment.

An overview of the DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge 2022 can be accessed by visiting the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYpzGV_QTDM.



PAST THEMES AND SPONSORS



2019



2020



2021



2022



2023



2024



2025



2026 Sponsors

TBC

SUCCESS STORIES



Khanyisa Faith Mokgolobotho

I am a Mathematical Science graduate and an Honours student in Computer Science and Information Technology. I'm currently employed as a Software Development Engineer in a graduate program. My participation in the Datathon was an eye-opener into the world of data science, technology, and innovation. After winning the Best Female Participant award in the Datathon, I received funding for both my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, which further fuelled my passion for tech. This experience led me to explore more hackathons and opportunities for women in tech. I am also a co-founder and director of a tech startup, dedicated to driving innovation in the industry.



Tshepiso Mogola

Hello! I am Tshepiso Zanele Mogola, a curious and ambitious Grade 12 learner at Phateng Comprehensive School. I'm passionate about understanding the world around me, which is why I am enthusiastic about my subjects: Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Geography and Mathematics. I attended the 2023 DIRISA Student Datathon which led to me receiving a bursary from Korbicom Educational Trust. The bursary will cover my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in any STEM field of my choosing in 2025. The datathon allowed me to be able to see my abilities, strengths and problem solving skills. I became a part of GCCI where I developed impressive projects like coding a website. Participating in the DIRISA Datathon was like being a data detective – it helped me to crack the code to my dream career!! Thank you team DIRISA.



Daniel Kenan Slinda

I am currently in my third year of a Diploma in ICT at the University of Mpumalanga, where I also serve as a student research assistant. In the past, I have been a mentor and tutor. I run my own enterprise, focusing on developing software solutions for the retail sector. Currently, I am working on a project for the University of Mpumalanga to digitize all paperwork and transactions on their farm. The skills I gained from participating in the Datathon have greatly advanced my career, enabling me to perform well under pressure and consistently deliver results. I truly appreciate being part of this experience.



Fundiswa khanyi

My name is Fundiswa Khanyi, a final Computer Science student at Tshwane University of Technology. I am currently a Software Development Intern at ICEP, where I am completing my Work Integrated Learning(WIL) module. The Datathon helped me discover the power of data-driven decision-making. That was something new to as considering that the course I am doing now only deals with Software Development. However, participating in the Datathon helped me develop a growth mindset, embracing challenges and continuous learning in my career. After the Datathon, I started learning more about Data Science before I am inspired to pursue a career in Data Science.

IMPACT AND REACH



Figure 2: DIRISA Datathon Reach and Impact

Figure 2 above depicts the impact and number of South African public institutions that have taken part in the DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge.

Program Reach & Regional Impact:

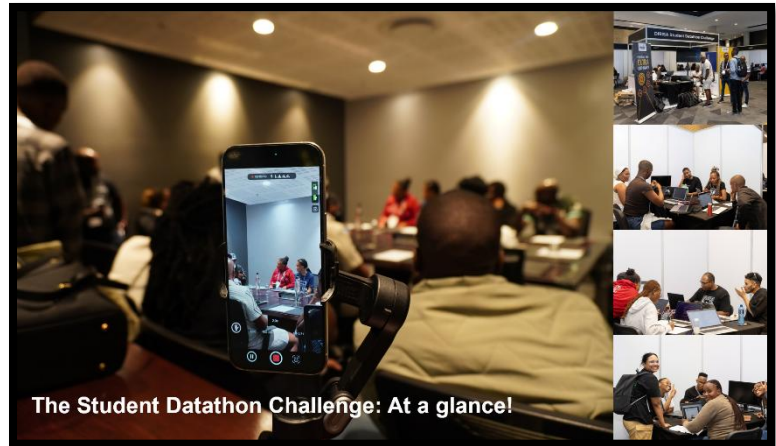
Over the past three years, the Student Datathon initiative has scaled; expanding its reach and building technical capacity across Southern Africa:

- **1,300+ Applicants – A highly competitive pool of talent.**
- **800+ Learners Trained – Upskilling both university students and high school learners.**
- **SADC Regional Expansion – Scaling beyond South Africa to include two universities within the SADC region, fostering cross-border collaboration.**

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge gives all sponsors an opportunity to:

- 📱 Contribute to the Datathon
- 📱 Have logos displayed as sponsors of the Datathon on distributed documentation and awards.
- 📱 Acknowledgement during the introduction, and to handout awards at the prize giving ceremony.
- 📱 Place promotional material at the DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge Venue.



Sponsorships are for the 1st team, 2nd team, 3rd team in both technical and research challenges, best female and best male.

	Student Datathon Challenge (SDC) Sponsorship Package Tier			
	Gold (≥ R125 000)	Silver Plus (R95 000)	Silver (R70 000)	Bronze (≤ R40 000)
A dedicated presentation slot during the SDC 2026 Welcoming Session.	20	15	10	
Opportunity to co-define the DIRISA Datathon theme and problem statements.	✓			
Naming rights for a Specific Datathon challenge.	✓	✓		
Sponsor acknowledgement on the SDC and NICIS websites.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity to distribute promotional materials, corporate brochures, and pamphlets directly to SDC students.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sponsor acknowledgement on LinkedIn.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Keynote at the NICIS National Student Competitions awards ceremony.	10 Minutes			
Provide a judge to be part of the panel for the final presentations.	2	1		
Opportunity to provide an expert technical mentor for the final datathon.	✓			
Main stage banner displays and official student prize handover participation.	✓			
Main-stage photo opportunities with challenge winners.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Placement of sponsor logo on the t-shirt to be given to the students.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to participants CVs (Subject to consent).	✓	✓	✓	✓
Branding rights for a pull-up banner placement at the venue.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Custom in-kind sponsorship options (including laptops, bursaries, accommodation support, international study opportunities, internships, or digital course subscriptions) are welcome, subject to Steering Committee approval.				

Sponsorship value: R 350K and over

The future plans of the DIRISA Student Datathon Challenge is to sponsor the winning team to attend an international competition. This sponsorships would entail sponsoring the team's flights, accommodation and registration.

Contact

Sponsorship queries

- Dr. Katlego Phoshoko: kphoshoko1@csir.co.za

Datathon queries

- Mr. Ntlharhi Baloyi nbaloyi2@csir.co.za
- Mr. Xolani Nkosi xnkosi@csir.co.za



DIRISA SDC

STUDENT DATATHON CHALLENGE

The SDC website can be visited on <https://sdc.dirisa.ac.za/>