



*Overview of Grants, Scholarships,  
Fellowships & the Rating of Researchers*

*December 2007*

## NRF VISION 2015

World-class research

Transformed society

Sustainable environment

### Purpose of this Booklet

This booklet is intended to give a brief overview of the large array of NRF offerings, including grants, scholarships, fellowships and the evaluation of the research profiles of individual researchers (the rating system). The information contained in the booklet contains minimal detail as it is our intention to provide a starting point from which the reader is invited to follow interesting leads that will give them a more complete picture. It is best, therefore, to read this overview in conjunction with a number of other sources of information which will give greater detail. These sources would include the NRF Vision 2015 document, NRF annual report, NRF business plan and specific programme Guides. Most of these documents are available on the NRF website, at [www.nrf.ac.za](http://www.nrf.ac.za). Information can also be gleaned from [info@nrf.ac.za](mailto:info@nrf.ac.za) or [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za).

### Disclaimer

The information in this booklet can and does change from time to time. Changes will be discussed and communicated with the research community where possible. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in the booklet is accurate, but if errors are noted or if changes occur then the NRF is not bound to abide by the original information.

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## Abbreviations

Centres of Excellence	CoE
Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism	DEAT
Department of Labour	DoL
Department of Science & Technology	DST
Department of Trade and Industry	The dti
Focus Area Programmes	FAPs
Higher education institution	HEI
Higher Education South Africa	HESA
Innovation Fund	IF
Institutional Research Development Programme	IRDp
Internationally Supported Collaboration (Bi-laterals and bi-nationals)	ISL
Knowledge Interchange & Collaboration	KIC
National Laser Centre	NLC
National Nano-Equipment Programme	NNEP
National Research Equipment Programme	NEP
National Research Foundation	NRF
National System of Innovation	NSI
Research Niche Areas	RNAs
South African Research Chair Initiative	SARChI
Technology & Human Resources for Industry Programme	THRIP
Thuthuka	TTK

# 1 Introduction

The mandate of the NRF, as provided by the NRF Act of 1998, is to “promote and support research through funding, [and] human resource development. . .” This is translated into a wide array of funding opportunities such as research grants, scholarships, fellowships and the benchmarking of an individual researcher’s research profile (the rating system). Collectively these functions are referred to as awards and are concentrated in the Research and Innovation, Support and Advancement business unit (RISA).

The disciplinary focus of RISA is very broad as it supports research and research capacity development in all fields of knowledge and technology, including the Social Sciences, Humanities, the Law, Natural Sciences, Engineering and all forms of indigenous knowledge.

The awards managed by RISA can be conveniently divided into two categories: Financial awards including research grants, scholarships and fellowships that are collectively referred to as grants, and rating awards.

## *1.1 Grant Management*

Grant management in turn is made up of two distinct activities:

- Pre-award activities or grant making - All grants are awarded on a competitive basis using peer review of proposals submitted to the NRF - and
- Post-award activities or grant paying - The transfer of money to grant-holder’s institutions (grants are seldom if ever paid to individuals) and the monitoring of the expenditure.

NB! All applications need to be submitted during specific call periods and using the NRF Online system (<http://nrfonline.ac.za>), unless otherwise indicated.

**NB! All applicants MUST keep their CVs, which are captured on the NRF Online system, current as they are often used in the assessment of proposals.**

The NRF disburses funding from various sources, including:

- The Parliamentary Science Vote, in accordance with its own mandate given to it by the NRF Act. This is called the core grant.
- Various departments of Government, for example:
  - Department of Science and Technology (DST),
  - Department of Labour (DoL),

- Department of Trade and Industry (The dti),
  - Department of Environment and Tourism (DEAT)
- This money is disbursed according to strict criteria laid down by the sponsor. These funds are called either Ring-fenced or Contract grants.

Grants are awarded on a competitive basis and adjudicated through peer review, as described in Figure 1, the Grant Management Cycle. The typical period of the grant management cycle is one year.

## *1.2 Evaluation and Rating*

The evaluation and rating of individuals is based primarily on the quality of the research outputs in the recent past (over the last seven years) and is undertaken by national and international peer reviewers who are requested to critically scrutinize the completed research.

Currently there are six rating categories (A, B, C, P, Y, and L) which the Assessment Panels use to assess the standing of applicants amongst their peers. These rating categories are defined at <http://evaluation.nrf.ac.za/Content/Evaluation/Apply.htm>, but are likely to be updated in response to the recently completed independent review of the rating system conducted by HESA.

The rating system was introduced for applicants in the National Sciences and Engineering in 1984 and for applicants in the Social Sciences and Humanities in 2002.

### **1.2.1 Why should researchers seek to be rated?**

There are two main reasons why researchers seek to be rated:

- Researchers who are rated by the NRF receive incentive funding and are eligible for extended periods of research funding. Rated researchers can apply for a grant at any time during their rating cycle and their rating is often taken into account by the peer review process.
- Rating can be used as a tool in benchmarking purposes. Researchers can compare their standing in the research community against that of their peers nationally (institutionally) and internationally.

## 1.2.2 The Rating Procedure

The rating procedure is described on the NRF website (<http://evaluation.nrf.ac.za/>) and is briefly illustrated in Figure 2. This procedure will be reviewed as a consequence of the outcomes of the independent review of the rating system mentioned above.

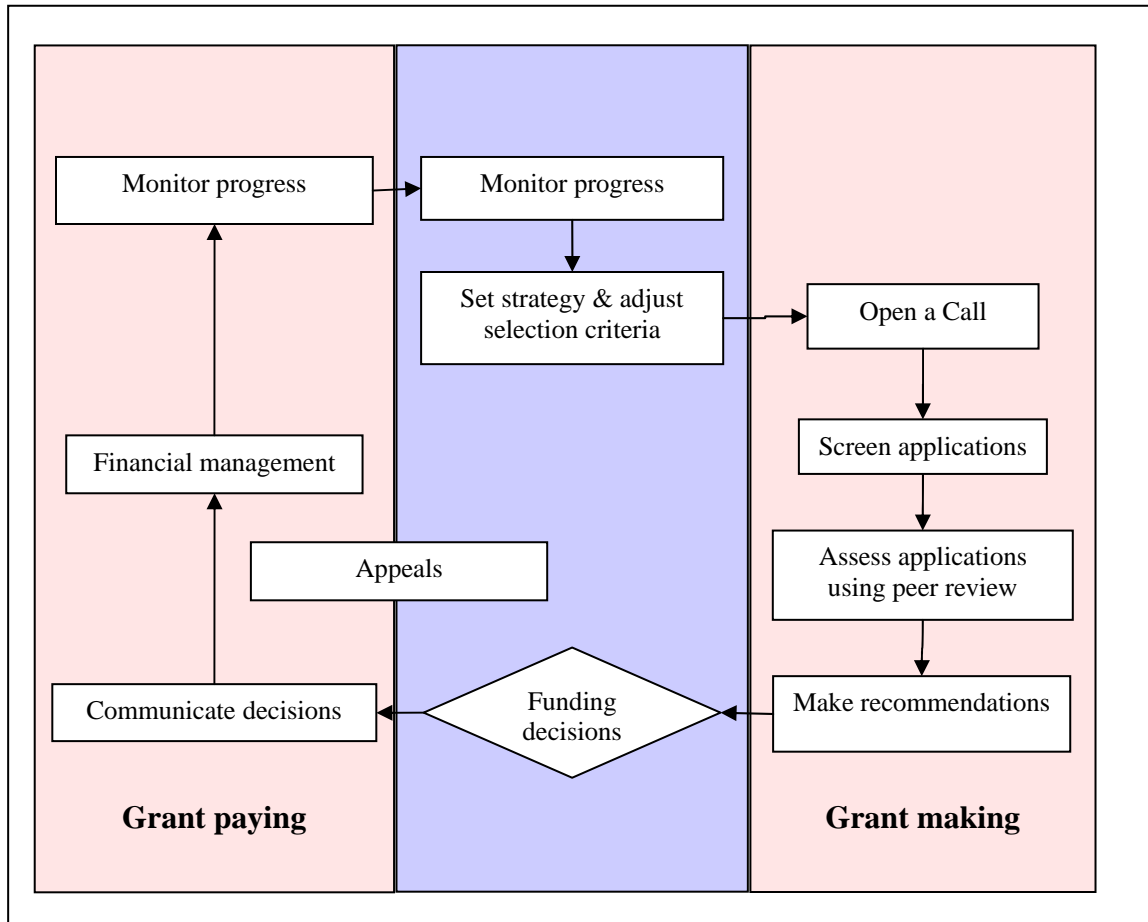


Figure 1: Grant management cycle

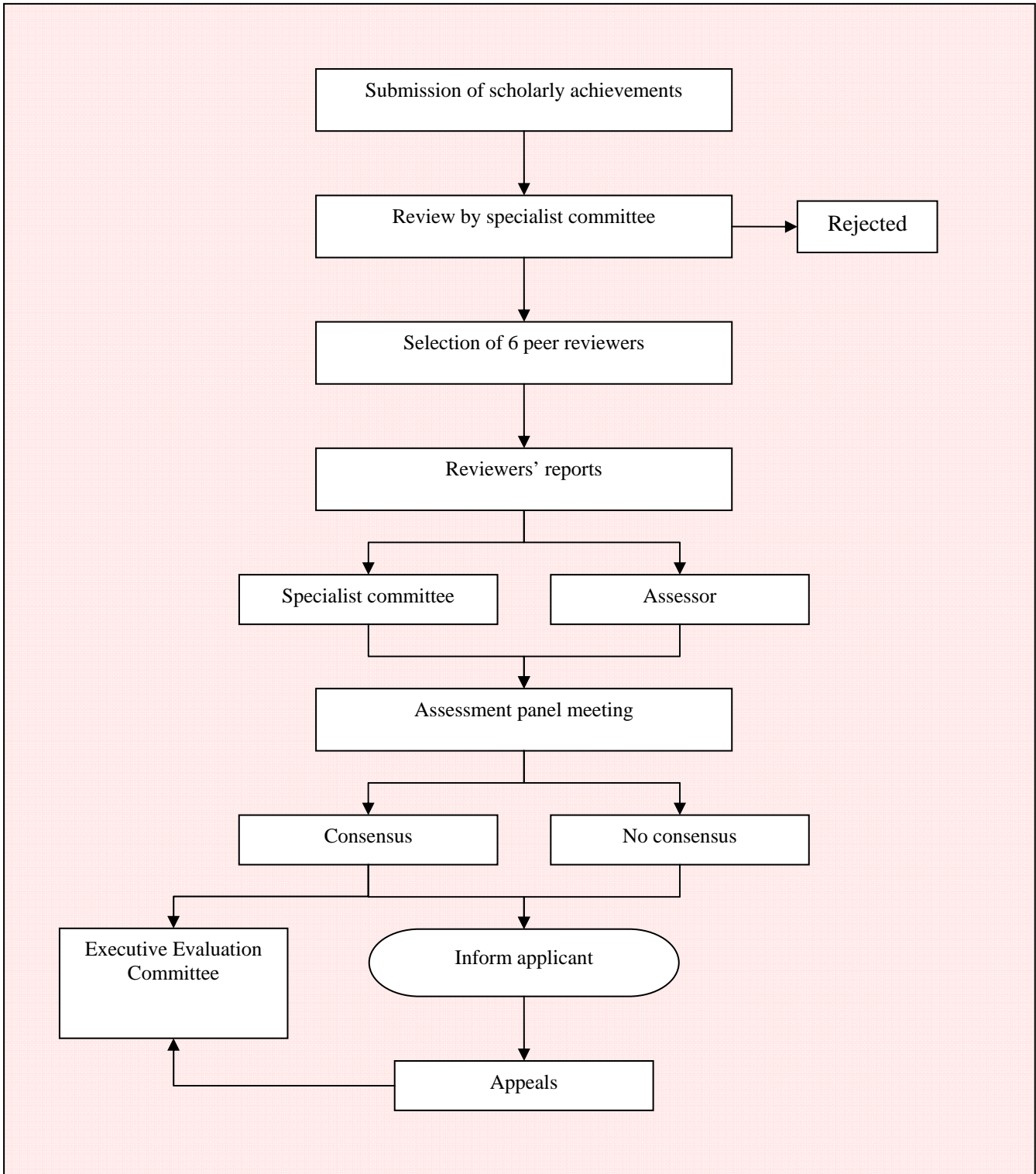


Figure 2: Evaluation and rating process

## 2 Investment Strategy

The NRF invests its limited resources strategically according to the following broad principles:

- Funding is awarded on a competitive basis,
- A healthy balance between strategy-driven vs. demand-pull,
- Merit-based and rigorous peer review,
- The Ph.D. as a driver,
- Cross-fertilisation of talent within NSI,
- Effective, goal oriented resource allocation,
- Fairness, transparency, accountability,
- Towards transformation AND excellence.

To this end, the NRF has identified seven broad investment areas. They are listed in Table 1 together with an indication of the approximate proportion of the total NRF grant budget set aside for each investment area. This allocation of resources will change over time in response to developments in the landscape of the NSI, but will remain within the guidelines set by the NRF strategy.

Broad Investment Areas	% of budget
Established researchers	18%
Human Capital Development and unrated researchers	23%
Strategic Knowledge Fields	23%
Strategic Platforms (Including research at the National Research Facilities)	11%
International Initiatives	11%
Applied & Industrial Research & Innovation	14%
Community Engagement Research	0.2%
TOTAL	100%

Table 1: Broad investment areas

## 3 Funding Opportunities

The NRF has a wide range of funding opportunities. These opportunities are dynamic and can change without notice. Readers are recommended to regularly visit the NRF website to check for notifications of changes and updates on their current status. A list of the current major funding opportunities is provided in Table 2. Please note that the funding opportunities linked to the Innovation Fund are not listed in this table as the IF will be moving to the Technology and Innovation Agency shortly.

Broad Investment Area	Specific Funding Opportunity
Established researchers	SARChI
	Incentive funding for rated researchers
	Phase out of direct support for Ps KIC - Travel and events support
Human Capital Development and unrated researchers	Support for unrated researchers
	Thuthuka
	Research Niche Areas
	PhD Programme
Strategic Knowledge Fields	Free Standing Scholarships (PD, D, M, H)
	Curiosity Driven Research
	Phase out of FAPs
	KF Development Grants
	IKS
	SABI, MCM, SANC
	AOP
	Multi-wavelength
	SANAP
	AGAP
Strategic Platforms (Including research at the National Research Facilities)	Competition
	"HEI" Researchers working at Facilities
	Funding formula for Facilities
	CoEs
	ACEP
	NIThP
	Equipment mobility
	National Research Equipment Programme
	National Nano-Equipment Programme
National Laser Centre	
International Initiatives	von Humboldt
	ISL - Bilaterals
	ISL - Bi-nationals
	Royal Society
	IAEA
	KISC
	ICSU
	Regional co-operation fund Focus on Africa
Applied & Industrial Research & Innovation	THRIP
	Industrial CoE
Community engagement research	Research into community outreach

Table 2: List of major, current funding opportunities in the NRF (new opportunities in bold)

## 4 Eligibility Requirements

The eligibility requirements for all RISA funding and rating instruments bar those related to student scholarships are summarised below.

The requirements are presented in a hierarchy starting with the general and moving to the progressively more specific.

### 1. Overarching requirements

The following persons are eligible to apply for awards (funding and rating):

- All researchers who are employed and remunerated on a full-time, part-time or contract basis at various institutions as defined in Table 3, OR
- Persons who are being considered for full-time employment at various institutions as defined for each specific instrument in Table 3, OR
- Persons from other institutions that conduct research who are formally affiliated (e.g., appointed as a visiting professor, visiting research associate/professor) to one of the institutions as defined for each specific instrument in Table 3. (In the case of grant funding, the funds will be sent to the affiliated institution.) OR
- Retired academics/researchers who are:
  - Resident in South Africa, AND
  - Formally affiliated (e.g. appointed as an emeritus professor, honorary research associate/professor, supernumerary/ contract employee) to a research institution as defined in Table 3 and whose application is formally supported and endorsed by the institution to which he/she is or is anticipating to be affiliated, AND
  - Active researchers with a distinguished track record in research and postgraduate student supervision, AND
  - Still actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff.

The NRF primarily supports research intensive institutions through its awards instruments. Research intensive institutions conduct basic or applied research of a pre-competitive nature for the benefit of the long-term knowledge base whilst being committed to human resource capacity development, including a commitment to equity and redress.

Within this definition of a research intensive institution there are many types of institutions. The specific types of institution supported by the NRF through its various funding and rating instruments are listed in Table 3 below.

## 2. Eligibility requirements for Research Grants

Although not always an eligibility requirement the quality of all applications for funding is greatly enhanced by having either a student training track record and/or nominated student list.

Persons holding joint appointments between a South African institution and a foreign institution who are actively involved in research capacity building locally must be employed by the South African institution in a full-time capacity for a period of at least six months per annum and should spend at least six months per annum in South Africa.

### a. Research Grants (for projects)

#### i. All programmes

Proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup> and the proposed research must align with the strategy of the programme.

#### ii. Thuthuka

Proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup>, applicant must be less than 45 years old<sup>2</sup>, with financial support from the host institution, proposed research must fall within one of the eight focus areas, and:

##### 1. Woman in Research

Applicant must be a woman researcher with PhD

##### 2. Researchers in Training

Applicant must have a Masters degree, must register for a PhD

##### 3. REDIBA

Applicant must be a Black male researcher with PhD

#### iii. Institutional Research Development Programme

Proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup>, the proposed research must align with an approved research niche area, must be supported financially by the host institution.

#### iv. THRIP

Proposed project must have financial support from an industry partner (preferably an SMME), the research must produce a product / process / prototype, it must be innovative (able to be commercialised) AND involve technology transfer, the proposal must produce additionality<sup>3</sup>, it must have recognised scientific or technological outputs, it must contribute to the competitive edge of the investing industrial partners.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the NRF

<sup>2</sup> This requirement is likely to be removed in the near future

<sup>3</sup> Please read THRIP guide for a definition of additionality

v. SARCHI

The proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup>, applicant must have a PhD, a four or more year track record of research that is excellent and sustained and/or clearly on an upward trajectory, have a track record in supervising postgraduate students, have a record of being able to obtain external funding, reside full time in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award.

vi. CoE

Proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup>, applicants must have a strong network of collaborators and fellow researchers working in similar and different, but related research fields. The network must span departments, schools and institutions, have excellent and extended track record in research outputs.

b. International Co-operation Research Grants

The proposed work must constitute research<sup>1</sup>, the applicants must have a research collaborator in the country which is a signatory to the bi-national (or bilateral<sup>4</sup>) agreement, the applicant must have a PhD degree.

c. Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (KIC)

The proposed collaboration must be on work that constitutes research<sup>1</sup>, the applicant must be employed by the host institution or be a full-time Masters or PhD student registered at the host institution.

d. Infrastructure Grants

The applicant must be an employed researcher at an institution described in Table 3

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<sup>4</sup> Between NRF and a funding agency in another country, e.g., NRF-CNRS (in France)

Broad Investment Area	Award programme	South African HEIs	Science Councils	Museums	National Research Facilities	Approved state funded research institutions	Private HEIs operating in SA (NON-PROFIT)	HEIs from other countries	APPROVED NGO's	Private sector companies
Evaluation of individual research track records		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Established researchers	SARCHI	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Incentive funding for rated researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	KIC (Travel and events support)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
Human Capital Development & unrated researchers	Support for unrated researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Thuthuka	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
	Research Niche Areas	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Doctoral Free Standing Scholarships	Y	N	L	L	N	N	Y	N	N
	Masters Free Standing Scholarships	Y	N	L	L	N	N	N	N	N
	Disabled (H, M, D)	Y	N	L	N	N	N	N	N	N
Strategic Knowledge Fields	Postdoctoral	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
	Curiosity Driven Research	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
	SABI	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Strategic Platforms	MCM, SANC, AOP, IKS	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
	"HEI" researchers working at Facilities	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
	CoE Director	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	CoE member	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
	Equipment mobility	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	NEP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	NNEP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
International Initiatives	NLC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	ISL - Bilaterals	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	ISL - Bi-nationals	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Applied & Industrial Research & Innovation	Other similar programmes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	THRIP	Y	Y	Y	Y	L	N	N	N	N
	Industrial CoE Director	Y	L	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Community Engagement Research	Industrial CoE members	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Research into outreach	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N

Table 3: Institutions supported by the NRF's funding and rating opportunities (See key on following page)

Key to Table 3		
Y	=	Yes - supported
N	=	No - not supported
L	=	Linked - cannot apply directly but can benefit
South African HEIs	=	All of South Africa's 23 state funded institutions of higher learning
Science Councils	=	Statutory science councils, e.g., CSIR, Mintek, etc.
Museums	=	Research intensive museums
National Research Facilities	=	HartRAO, HMO, iThemba LABS, NZG, SAAO, SAASTA, SAIAB, SAEON
Approved state research institutions	=	Research intensive institutions that are state funded, e.g., NECSA
Private HEIs in SA (Not for profit)	=	E.g., Monash
HEIs from other countries	=	E.g., Oxford, Harvard, etc.
Approved NGO's	=	Research intensive NGO's registered in South Africa & approved by RISA
Private sector companies	=	Local and foreign industry (for profit organisations)

## 5 Restrictions on holding multiple NRF grants

The rules concerning the restriction on holding multiple NRF grants are given below.

- Researchers may not receive more than one grant for identical or closely related proposals. The decision whether two proposals are identical or sufficiently similar to constitute "double dipping" will be tested by peer review.
- A student may receive only one bursary or scholarship from the NRF at a time.
- A student who is being supported by an NRF bursary or scholarship may not also apply for a research grant.
- A student may not receive an NRF bursary or scholarship if he/she is contracted to a company in any manner.
- A researcher may not receive more than two simultaneous grants from the NRF core grant budget. These grants are indicated in yellow in Table 4.
- Only one Thuthuka grant can be given to an individual. If a Thuthuka grant-holder gets rated during their 6 year cycle they may continue to be supported to the end of that cycle. Rated researchers may not apply for Thuthuka grants.
- Table 4 below indicates the restrictions of holding multiple NRF grants. This table should be read by identifying the grant one holds (or hopes to hold) in the left of the table (column 1) and then to check which other grants can be held simultaneously by moving across the table.
- In Table 4 the following meanings are attached to the entries:
  - Y means yes, this combination is allowed,
  - N means no, this combination is not allowed, and
  - Y\* means yes, this combination is allowed subject to conditions.

How to read this table: Select a suitable cell in this column that represents the grant that you hold (or would like to hold) and then read off what other grants you can apply for by reading across the page <u>from left to right</u> .	CoE Director	CoE member	SARCHI	Incentive funding for rated researchers	Support for unrated researchers	TTK	RNAs	Free Standing Scholarships (H, M, D)	Postdoctoral	Curiosity Driven Research	SABI	MCM, SANC, AOP, IKS	HEIs working at Facilities	NEP, NNEP, NLC	ISL - Bilaterals & Bi-nationals	THRIP	Director of industrial CoE	Member of industrial CoE	Research into outreach
CoE Director	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
Independent researcher within CoE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
SARCHI	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
Incentive funding for rated researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
Support for unrated researchers	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
TTK	N	Y	N	Y*	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
RNAs	N	Y	N	Y*	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	N	Y	Y
Free Standing Scholarships (H, M, D)	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Postdoctoral	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Curiosity Driven Research	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
SABI	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
MCM, SANC, AOP, IKS	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
HEIs working at Facilities	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
NEP, NNEP, NLC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
ISL - Bilaterals and Bi-nationals	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
THRIP	Y*	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
Director of industrial CoE	N	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
Independent research within industrial CoE	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y
Research into outreach	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y*	Y	Y	Y

Table 4: Restriction on multiple funding combinations

Key to Table 4	
Y	= Yes , this combination is allowed
Y*	= Yes , this combination is allowed subject to conditions
N	= No, this combination is not allowed

## 6 Student Bursaries and Scholarships

The NRF supports post-graduate students in two ways, through:

1. Free Standing Scholarship Programmes in which the students apply and compete individually, and
2. Grant-holder linked bursaries. The grant-holder will be provided with a number of bursaries which he or she can use within the student bursary rules.

The NRF currently provides bursaries and scholarships to post-graduate students studying at South African Universities (HEIs) and in some cases other universities.

## 7 Duration of Awards

The duration of awards differ from programme to programme. However, in general awards are made for periods of time and in some cases there is a limit to the number of funding periods allowed. This is especially the case in the development programmes where the emphasis is on the development of research capacity. The duration of a Thuthuka grant, for example, is two cycles of three years each, giving a total support period of six years.

Further details of the duration of awards are provided in Table 5. Where there is no limit to the number of periods an infinity symbol " $\infty$ " is indicated, meaning that the total support can be for the duration of the researcher's career given peer review support.

Broad Investment Area	Award	Award period / years	Number of periods	Total support time / years
Evaluation of individual research track records		5	∞	∞
Established Researchers	SARChI	5	3	15
	Incentive funding for rated researchers	5	∞	∞
	Phase out of direct support for Ps	4	1	4
	KIC	Once off grants		
Human Capital Development & unrated researchers	Support for unrated researchers	3	∞	∞
	Thuthuka	3	2	6
	Research Niche Areas	3	2	6
	Postdoctoral	2	2	4
	Doctoral	3	1	3
	Masters	2	1	2
	Honours	1	1	1
Strategic Knowledge Fields	Curiosity Driven Research	3	∞	∞
	Phase out of FAPs	4	1	4
	KF Development Grants	Once off grants		
	SABI, IKS, MCM, SANC, AOP, SANAP, AGAP, ACEP, etc.	Various		
Strategic Platforms (Equipment and working with the National Research Facilities)	HEI Researchers working at Facilities	3	∞	∞
	Funding formula for National Research Facilities	1	∞	∞
	CoEs	10	1	10
	Equipment mobility	Once off grants		
	NEP, NNEP	2	1	2
	National Laser Centre	1	∞	∞
International Initiatives	ISL - Bilaterals	Various		
	ISL - Bi-nationals	Various		
Applied & Industrial Research & Innovation	THRIP	3	∞	∞
	Industrial CoE	5	1	5
Community Engagement Research	Research into community outreach	3	∞	∞

Table 5: Duration of awards

## 8 Grant, Fellowship & Scholarship Payment Process

NRF pays grant money to the applicant's institution of employment. Batch payments are made once per month during the third week of the month. Each payment is accompanied by a description of which grant the money is earmarked for and a monthly statement is emailed to the awardee and his/her institution. The process of making a payment is described in the Figure 3.

This payment process is currently under construction and will change shortly. The change will affect the order of the steps shown in Figure 3; payments will follow expense reporting.

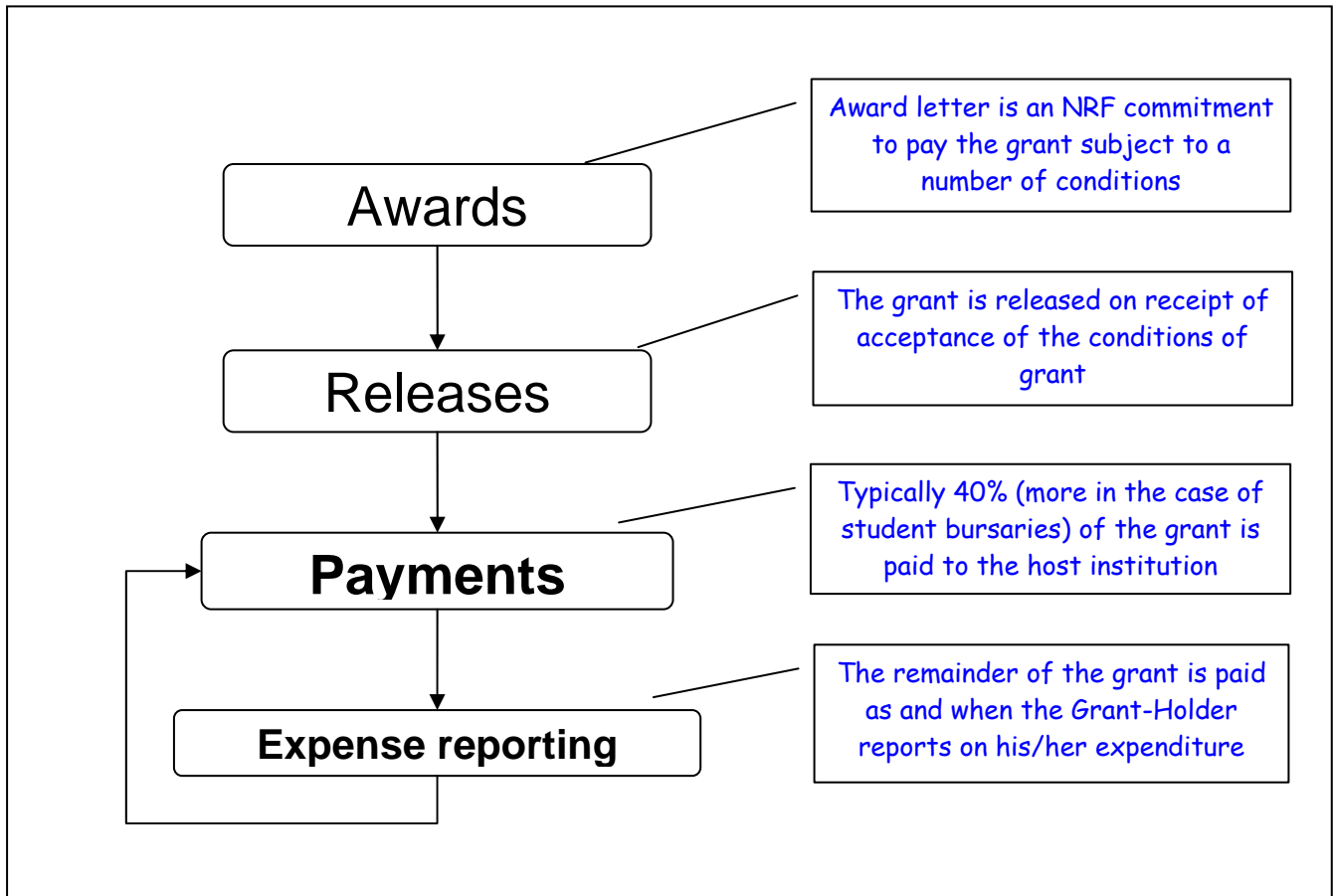


Figure 3: Payment process

## 9 Conclusion

In closing we take the opportunity to wish you well in your research and sincerely hope that the NRF can assist you in the search of excellence.

Please visit the NRF website, at [www.nrf.ac.za](http://www.nrf.ac.za) for more information on specific award opportunities or send questions (of a general nature) to [info@nrf.ac.za](mailto:info@nrf.ac.za) or to [supportdesk@nrf.ac.za](mailto:supportdesk@nrf.ac.za) (for grant related queries).