Grants Management and Systems Administration
Masters and Doctoral Scholarships Grants
Application and Funding Guide for 2017
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 5
2. Value of support .............................................................................................................. 5
2.1. Innovation, SSDF and students with disability ......................................................... 5
3. Application Process ....................................................................................................... 8
4. How to Submit Applications .......................................................................................... 9
5. Screening and Review Processes .................................................................................. 19
  5.1. Overview of the Screening Process .......................................................................... 19
  5.2. Overview of the Review Process .............................................................................. 19
6. Ranking of Applications ............................................................................................... 20
7. Applications Feedback and Disputes .......................................................................... 21
8. Awardee Responsibilities ............................................................................................. 21
  8.1 Reporting .................................................................................................................... 21
  8.2 Managing changes during the project life cycle ......................................................... 22
  8.2.1 Change Requests .................................................................................................. 22
  8.2.1.1 Prior Approval Requests ................................................................................... 22
  8.2.1.2 Changes in Project Scope, Supervisor or Institution ........................................... 22
9. Scientific Compliance .................................................................................................... 22
  9.1 Methodology .............................................................................................................. 22
  9.2 Intellectual Property Rights ....................................................................................... 22
  9.3 Ethics ........................................................................................................................ 22
10. List of References ......................................................................................................... 23
## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APR</th>
<th>Annual Progress Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Designated Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMSA</td>
<td>Grants Management and Systems Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HICD</td>
<td>Human and Institutional Capacity Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISA</td>
<td>Research and Innovation Support and Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRF</td>
<td>National Research Foundation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contact Details

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Application and funding guidelines are explained in this document. Applicants must read this document together with the NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Development Fund (SSDF) Masters and Doctoral Scholarships Framework Document which highlights the eligibility criteria and requirements of each funding instrument.

For technical online enquiries, please contact the NRF Support Desk during office hours from 08:00 to 16:30 Monday to Friday.

Tel: 012-481 4202

E-mail: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za
1. **Introduction**

This Guide provides an overview of the application process and funding guidelines for the NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Development Fund (SSDF) Masters and Doctoral Scholarships funding instruments. It should be read in conjunction with the above-mentioned Framework document which may be accessed at [https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za](https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za). The Framework document provides detailed information with respect to the objectives of the funding instruments, eligibility criteria and so forth. This document does not however, constitute a complete set of the policies, procedures or systems used by the NRF.

2. **Value of support**

Scholarship values for full-time postgraduate students are indicated in (Tables 1, 2 and 3). Masters (NRF Freestanding only) awards will be administered as a block grant to universities at which the students will be registered for a postgraduate degree (Table 2). The period of support is calculated from the first year of registration for the study or research regardless of NRF funding.

2.1. **Innovation, SSDF and students with disability**

Table 1: Bursary and Scholarship values for Innovation, SSDF and Students with Disability for full-time postgraduate studies for the 2017 academic year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Scholarship value (per annum)</th>
<th>Maximum Funding period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>R90 000</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>R120 000</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assistive devices for students with disabilities**

Scholarship-holders with a disability may apply for additional funding for an assistive technology device of up to R20 000. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship. As defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), an assistive technology device is "any piece of equipment, or product system, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities".
Travel grants for Masters Students

In addition, Masters scholarship-holders may apply for a travel grant of up to R15 000 which may be used to attend local conferences, workshops, and a visit to a laboratory or any other activity that supports the beneficiaries’ current research progression. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship for Innovation, SSDF and students with disabilities.

Travel grants for Doctoral students

Doctoral scholarship-holders may apply for a travel grant of up to R15 000, for local travel, and up to R50 000, for international travel. These funds may be used to attend conferences, workshops, visits to a laboratory or, any other activity that supports the beneficiaries’ current research progression. These are the maximum amounts allowed during the tenure of the scholarship for Innovation, SSDF and students with disability.

Scholarship-holders who wish to access the travel grant and/or assistive technology device must complete a travel grant and/or assistive technology device application form accessible from the NRF system for consideration and approval/disapproval by the NRF.

2.2. NRF Freestanding

Table 2: NRF Freestanding Bursary and Scholarships values for fulltime postgraduate students for the 2017 academic year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Scholarship value (per annum)</th>
<th>Maximum Funding period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>R50 000</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>R70 000</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assistive devices for students with disabilities

Student with disability scholarship-holders may apply for additional funding for an assistive technology device of up to R20 000. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship. As defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), an assistive technology device is "any piece of equipment, or product system, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities".

Travel grants for Masters and Doctoral Students

In addition, Masters and Doctoral scholarship-holders may apply for a travel grant of up to R10 000 which may be used to attend local conferences, workshops, and a visit to a laboratory or any other activity that supports the beneficiaries’ current research progression. This is the maximum amount allowed during the tenure of the scholarship for NRF Freestanding.

Scholarship-holders who wish to access the travel grant and/or assistive technology device must complete a travel grant and/or assistive technology device application form accessible from the NRF system for consideration and approval/disapproval by the NRF.

2.3. Doctoral Abroad

The value of the scholarship will be calculated as the equivalent of the United States Dollar (USD) of 22 000 per annum, for a maximum of four (4) years (Table 3), and will be paid out in the currency of the country in which the Doctoral studies will be undertaken. In addition, the NRF will cover the cost of:

- A single cheapest economy airfare for travel to the country in which the Doctoral studies will be undertaken; and
- A single cheapest economy airfare to return to South Africa upon completion of the Doctoral studies abroad.

Table 3: NRF Doctoral abroad Scholarship, for fulltime postgraduate students for the 2017 academic year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Scholarship value (per annum)</th>
<th>Maximum Funding period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>22 000 USD</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The NRF will not cover any costs for accompanying family members or any other related costs associated with the Doctoral studies. The applicant will be responsible for securing additional funding to cover any shortfall in funding required to undertake his/her doctoral studies abroad.

3. Application Process

The NRF is publishing the NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Development Fund Masters and Doctoral Scholarships Call on the NRF website that is accessible online at https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za. Each applicant is limited to only one (1) application per year. Once an applicant submits an application, it will be duly authorised and approved by the Designated Authority (DA) of the research administration at the prospective South African host institution where the applicant intends to undertake the Masters or Doctoral studies. Applications will be automatically routed to the institutional DA of the submitting institution for validation on the deadline date determined by individual institutions. Applicants must enquire with their institutions regarding internal closing dates. The processing of a successful grant application takes approximately five (5) months from the closing date of applications until the commencement of funding.
4. How to Submit Applications

All applicants must consult with his/her proposed supervisor in the process of submitting an application to ensure that the supervisor is in agreement with the scientific aspects contained in the application and, the proposed work plan for completion of the degree. Applications may be completed on the NRF Online Submission System at https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za from Thursday, 02 June 2016. Applicants are advised to complete their applications well ahead of the closing date to prevent IT system overload nearer the closing date of Friday, 29 July 2016.

Step 1: This is an electronic submission system and applicants must be registered on the system in order to create and complete an application. If you were registered on the NRF Online System (http://nrfonline.nrf.ac.za) before February 2012, your details would have been migrated to the new NRF Online Submission System (https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za). If you experience problems accessing the system with your NRF Online password, use the Reset Password button. If you are not yet registered on the NRF Online Submission System, you must register to access the application form.
Most application screens have a screen and application-specific instructions to help the applicant work through the sections. Please read the instructions carefully before completing the section.

**Step 2:** Once you have logged onto the NRF Online Submission System, on the landing page, go to the left hand side black menu (tab indicated with blue arrow) to create a new application, go to My Applications-CREATE Application.
Step 3: Select the funding call for which you are applying on the create application screen (i.e. NRF Freestanding, Innovation or Scarce Skills Masters and Doctoral Scholarships 2017), this will open up a new application for you to complete. Please note that this must be selected only once. To continue working on an application, go to My Applications- List of Applications.
Step 4: Applicants are urged to complete or update ALL screens of the CV, including the Research Profile and Research Outputs (if applicable), as this information is evaluated in the review process and will impact on the overall assessment of your application.

Step 5: All sections marked with a red asterisks are compulsory sections in the application. These sections must be completed in order for the final submit button to appear. The sections without asterisks are non-compulsory sections. You may enter information in these sections, if you
have information to enter, such as research outputs. Completed sections will be indicated by a green tick on the main menu, while incomplete sections will have a yellow cross. All compulsory sections will guide you with error messages. Please follow these messages to help you complete the section correctly.

Step 6: The Research Project Information section will require you to select, from a drop down list, your proposed institution. If your institution is not on the list, please request by selecting the information or new button next to the question.
Step 7: In the academic achievement section, please enter your academic average from your previous degree by adding up all your marks and dividing by the number of courses. If your institution does not provide a mark, please enter pass in the field. The review panel will compare the scores entered with your requested academic transcript. Applicants that enter a pass instead of an average academic mark will not be able to score more than the default score for this section.

The final submit button will only appear once all compulsory sections are completed. Please remember to submit your application for consideration. When an application has been submitted by the applicant, it is automatically routed to the Designated Authority (DA) in the Research Office or Post Graduate Funding Office of the institution that you have selected, for internal review and validation. Late applications, additional supporting documentation or information received after the closing date will not be accepted or considered. It is therefore in the applicant's best interest to be fully compliant in submitting an application.
Step 8: The Details of Research section is one of the most important sections in the application. Please provide an overview of your proposed research study in these sections. The section has specific instructions related to each screen. Follow the instructions to complete the section. It is important that you enter detailed information into this section as the input is taken into consideration during the assessment of your application. Appropriate literature references must also be included.

Step 9: The attachment section provides specific instructions for uploading attachments to the application. If you are a student living with a disability, you must also upload a medical certificate in support of your disability.
# Instructions

- Select the Document Type to be uploaded.
- Capture an appropriate Description.
- Click the Browse button below to select the file on your local machine.
- Click on the Upload button to save.
- Upload pages individually if document is larger than 4MB. (For rating applications, please see specific instructions in this section of the rating application.)
- Please do not upload zip files. Acrobat reader has built-in security to prevent the opening of zip files by default (please read the article at [http://forums.adobe.com/thread/1009513](http://forums.adobe.com/thread/1009513) for more information).

## Masters and Doctoral

- Please attach the necessary documents in one PDF file in the following order for this call: ID document, certified academic transcripts and proof of registration (if available).
- These are all required for application completeness.
- If you wish to include a motivation letter, please include this as part of your attachment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>File Name</th>
<th>Edit</th>
<th>View</th>
<th>Delete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

©NRF Online Submission System
Step 10: The Reference section allows applicants to include academic referees who can comment on the applicant’s academic abilities. On final submission of the application, the emails containing a reference response are sent automatically to the nominated referees to provide a report on the academic and research capabilities of the applicant. *The Master’s degree applicants will have to select at least one Master’s supervisor AND one academic referee in order for the section to mark as complete. The Doctoral degree applicants will have to select at least one Masters Supervisor, one Doctoral AND one academic referee in order for the section to mark as complete.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that the referee email address is correct and that the referees have responded by the closing date of 29 July 2016 as this category of the application is assessed. The applicant must periodically view the application PDF to check if a referee has responded to the request.

Step 11: Applicants must ensure that they adhere to their institution’s internal closing date for submission of their application to allow for internal institutional screening and review. The Institution’s internal closing date will be determined by the respective research offices or Post Graduate Office and is usually at least two weeks prior to the NRF’s closing date.

DA’s are required to ensure that all proposals are screened and approved through internal institutional processes before submitting the applications to the NRF. The NRF assumes that the prospective postgraduate supervisor and respective DAs are satisfied with the standard of all proposals validated and submitted, and that the institution approves and supports the proposed research.

Step 12: The final submit button will appear only if all compulsory sections have been completed. Press OK to submit your application. If all the compulsory sections are complete and the final submit button does not appear, select any section and resave to refresh the application; you will then see the final submit button. A submitted application is automatically routed to the DA in the Research Office of the institution that you selected, for internal review and validation. Late applications, additional supporting documentation or information received after the closing date will not be accepted or considered.
The NRF will not process applications that are incomplete, contain insufficient or incorrect detail, or fail to comply with instruction and such applications will be rejected. The application must be completed in sufficient detail to allow for a comprehensive review and evaluation by external reviewers. In addition to the electronic application and required attachments, the NRF may request additional information or documentation to support an application if required. Failure to supply such information or documentation upon request may result in the rejection of the application.

5. Screening and Review Processes

5.1. Overview of the Screening Process
All applications validated by institutions and submitted to the NRF are screened by the NRF for compliance with the eligibility criteria of the Call for applications, as well as the requirements for completing the NRF Online Submission application. Applications that fail to meet the stipulated requirements will be rejected.

5.2. Overview of the Review Process
The NRF’s peer review policy requires that all Masters and Doctoral applications be subjected to a review process. Applications submitted to this funding instrument will go through a panel review process.

5.2.1 Panel Review
Panel members are selected from the NRF database that is updated on a continuous basis, and other sources. In compiling the review panel, the expertise and experience of individuals in application adjudication are taken into account. In assessing the application, agreed assessment criteria are applied in the form of a scorecard (please refer to table 2 under Section 6).

The Review Panel provides recommendations to the NRF and the final funding decision is made by the NRF. In awarding grants in this funding instrument, the NRF takes into account the recommendations of the peer review panels, the objectives and targets of the funding instrument, and the available funds.
6. **Ranking of Applications**

The purpose of the scoring system is to evaluate applications, based on the criteria for the funding instrument, in order to determine applications that are most deserving of the limited funds available. All research scholarship applications submitted to the NRF for funding are evaluated according to a number of predetermined criteria. Applications are assessed and ranked on the basis of criteria as listed in the table below. Each area may be given a weighting to indicate its relative importance. Kindly consult the table 2 below for details on the criteria used.

**Table 2: Scorecard for the assessment of proposals for Masters Scholarships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Merit</td>
<td>Average percentage mark for previous degree.</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific merit of the proposal</td>
<td>Literature review Aims, objectives and methodology</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility</td>
<td>Work plan, project organisation, project scheduling and timelines.</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment with National Research Priorities</td>
<td>Alignment with one or more national research strategies and the potential for socio and/or economic impact</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Scorecard for the assessment of proposals for Doctoral and Doctoral abroad Scholarships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Merit</td>
<td>Average percentage mark for previous degree.</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant’s track Record</td>
<td>Past Research Outputs (e.g. Journal articles, conference presentations /proceedings, Book Chapters, Patents).</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific merit of the proposal</td>
<td>Novelty and Scientific contribution to new knowledge; multidisciplinary aspects; alignment of the research question with the methodology.</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility</td>
<td>Work plan, project organisation, project scheduling and timelines.</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Impact of the Research</td>
<td>Potential to contribute national research strategies and the strategic goals of the knowledge economy.</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Applications Feedback and Disputes

Once the review and assessment processes have been completed and the recommended funding decision has been approved by the NRF, the NRF will publish a list of successful applications on the NRF website, [www.nrf.ac.za/bursaries/calls](http://www.nrf.ac.za/bursaries/calls). The application status online will not indicate whether or not the application has been approved for funding. If your name does not appear on the published list of successful applications it means that your application was unsuccessful.

The NRF provides feedback on review outcomes to all unsuccessful applicants. However, due to the high volume of applications received, feedback may be sent out up to three months after the NRF Online publication of application outcomes.

Unsuccessful applicants that wish to appeal the funding decision taken by the NRF must follow the appropriate Appeals Process of the NRF. Appeals will only be considered for this funding instrument within one month of receiving feedback from the NRF.

8. Awardee Responsibilities

8.1 Reporting

Continued funding beyond the first year is dependent on the submission of an Annual Progress Report (APR) to the NRF during a call for APR’s in October / November of each grant year. Continued funding will be subject to satisfactory progress having been made, as reported in the APR.

An APR must be submitted by the awardee / grant-holder in a format provided by the NRF, documenting progress made against set objectives and research outputs. The NRF may in consultation with the Research Office, request interim progress reports for the purpose of implementing corrective measures timeously to ensure that stated objectives are met within stipulated timeframes.
8.2 Managing changes during the project life cycle
Changes may occur during the project life cycle due to unforeseen and extenuating circumstances. Please note the following on how to manage the award and subsequent changes (planned or unanticipated) should they arise during the project life cycle.

8.2.1 Change Requests

8.2.1.1 Prior Approval Requests
Applicants must submit all change requests in writing to the NRF for approval before effecting any changes. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and must be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office or Post graduate funding Office for approval prior to the change.

8.2.1.2 Changes in Project Scope, Supervisor or Institution
Circumstances may occur where a project scope, supervisor or institution needs to be changed from the original research proposal, supervisor or institution respectively. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office or Postgraduate Funding Office. Such requests must be forwarded to the NRF 30 days before the change is intended to take place.

9. Scientific Compliance

9.1 Methodology
The student, under supervision of the postgraduate supervisor, takes scientific responsibility for the research to be undertaken, including its objectives and the methodology outlined in the project proposal. The student is required to devote the necessary time to the research project in compliance with the work plan for the research proposal approved by the NRF so as to achieve the project’s stated aims and objectives.

9.2 Intellectual Property Rights
The intellectual capital generated by NRF funded research must be appropriately protected and exploited for the benefit of South Africa. This condition should not interfere with the Intellectual Property Rights arrangements already made, on condition that the majority of the benefits arising from the intellectual capital accrue to South Africa and its citizens. This condition is aligned with the Intellectual Property Rights Act, 1 which will override this condition of grant.

9.3 Ethics
The student is required to maintain the highest ethical and safety standards in conducting the research, particularly when human and animal subjects are involved. It remains the responsibility of the project leader to comply with all relevant regulations in this regard, including those of the
institution at which the research is carried out. An ethical clearance certificate (where applicable) must be submitted to the NRF in respect of successful applications before funding can be released.

10. List of References