



**INCENTIVE FUNDING FOR RATED RESEARCHERS (IFRR)**

**Knowledge Advancement and Support  
(KAS)**

**Framework Document and Funding Guide**

**February 2018**

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## 1 STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

In 2007, Universities South Africa (USAf) previously known as the Higher Education South Africa (HESA) led a review of the National Research Foundation's (NRF) evaluation and rating system. At the conclusion of the review, HESA acknowledged and endorsed the value that evaluation and rating of individuals add to the research promotion and support part of the NRF mandate. The review report recommended that the NRF re-establishes the link of the evaluation and rating system to funding. Based on this recommendation, the Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers (IFRR) instrument was created in 2008.

The NRF was mindful of the fact that the levels of individual monetary awards were relatively small and in most cases unlikely to support fully-fledged/large size research projects. At the same time, the NRF was convinced that however small the incentive awards may be, researchers could use the funds to supplement other funding; attend conferences; network and establish research partnerships; pay research assistants and so on. Flexibility was built into the administration of the funds to allow researchers to use the funds in various ways in keeping their research activities afloat during occasions when other funding is scarce. To facilitate this process, the NRF intentionally avoided a complex application procedure to access these funds. Unlike other NRF funding instruments that require grant applicants to explain in detail how research funds are to be used based on a budget, IFRR has not required this extent of motivation.

Since 2008, the NRF has invested R816 944 793 in this Funding Instrument. This investment has seen the number of rated researchers increase from 1 684 in 2008 to 3 689 in 2017. The number of rated researchers increased by 119% in 10 years, with an increase of 43.5% of A-rated researchers and 91.3% of B-rated researchers in this same period. While this increase in number of applications for rating cannot be fully attributed to the establishment of the IFRR, it certainly has had a significant influence. Despite the anecdotal positive benefits of the Funding Instrument, it has become evident in the past few years that the costs of supporting IFRR is simply not sustainable in the long term, especially in a constrained fiscal environment. The numbers of rated researchers increased each year and the costs of supporting them increased exponentially. This is in the midst of failure to adequately or fully support the same rated researchers for the multi-year research projects through research funding instruments like the Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers (CPRR) and Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR) funding instruments. Furthermore, the NRF is constrained by its inability to support new initiatives such as the support of persons that are neither eligible for CPRR and CSUR nor the Thuthuka Funding Instruments, most of whom are early career/emerging researchers.

Incentive Funding for Rated Research will continue to be awarded to rated researchers who hold a valid NRF rating. However, the funding model has been revised effective from this year, 2018. These grants will however continue to be used for research-related purposes. Flexibility will continue to be built into the administration of the funds to allow researchers to use the money in various ways similar to what has been provided for in IFRR in the past. **Carry forwards will not be allowed.** However, as indicated

in sections 4 and 5 below, researchers will indicate in the application form at the time of completing the form, when grant funds will be required and paid over the duration of their NRF rating cycle.

## **2 OBJECTIVES**

This funding aims to incentivize excellent research. Collateral objectives include encouraging researchers to:

- a. Subject themselves for rating,
- b. Maintain their ratings once they are rated, and
- c. Attain ever higher ratings until they reach the top of their potential.

## **3 ELIGIBILITY**

### **3.1 Full-time Academic Staff**

Funding will be awarded to rated researchers currently holding full-time academic or research positions at qualifying institutions. Researchers who allow their rating to lapse, or who lose their rating in the re-evaluation process will not qualify for NRF support under Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers until such time that they have regained a valid NRF rating.

### **3.2 Retired rated researchers**

Funding will be awarded to rated researchers affiliated to an NRF recognised research institution provided that:

- there is a demonstration of institutional support in the form of an employment contract, office space, administrative support, access to research equipment and space. The institution must ensure that minimum reasonable time is spent at the facility for the purpose of research and research capacity development;
- the researcher has a research track record which includes but is not limited to the successful training of research students.

### **3.3 Joint appointments**

**Fixed term contract/part time (C/PT) researchers** at NRF recognised research institutions who are active researchers with a notable track record in research and/or postgraduate student supervision and could include:

- a) Persons holding joint appointments between a public SA institution and a foreign institution; **or**
- b) Persons holding joint appointments between two institutions within SA (of which at least one appointment should be a formal association with an NRF recognised research institution).

Research offices are required to inform the NRF of such cases as the rating processes and procedures differ from those of the IFRR call management and award.

#### 4 APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINES

Researchers:

- who have never been rated before and whose rating starts on 01 January 2018
- who had a valid rating until 31 December 2017 who re-submitted and received a valid rating starting on 01 January 2018
- who allowed their rating to lapse but who re-submitted and received a valid rating starting on 01 January 2018 must apply for Incentive funding in 2018.
- who have a valid NRF rating in 2018, but did not apply for Incentive funding previously

All applications must be completed online at <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za>

Researchers will have to indicate in the application form at the time of completing the form, when these funds will be required over the duration of their NRF rating cycle (see table below for funding details)

The online application form consists of two sections:

- **Project Information** - where the system displays the rating, researchers have to complete the fields to compose their research profile.
- **Budget**- this is not the same as the budget for a research proposal, hence a budget motivation must be provided for the year and rating cycle in which the application is made indicating what the applicant hopes to achieve with the funding that will be awarded e.g. networking activities, student support, networking, outputs etc. The section that was completed for the rating application called "Ongoing and planned future research" will be migrated from the rating application at <https://submission.nrf.ac.za> to the section "Total Expected Outputs" to guide researchers to align the budget to these goals. If the rating application was done on an earlier online system, this field will be empty.

It is the responsibility of each applicant to familiarise him/herself with the internal closing date, set by their institution in order to meet the NRF closing date.

Please note:

If the outcome of a rating is communicated later than 15 March 2018, researchers will only be able to apply for and access incentive funding in 2019.

- The IFRR budget and allocation may not be implemented retrospectively and or back dated to previous years;
- Rating processes and procedures differ from those of the IFRR call management and award;
- If a researcher loses his/her rating in the year of funding, the Incentive grant will be cancelled until such time that he/she regains his/her rating.

There will be no matching fund required from institutions for P and Y rating as was the case in the past.

## 5 FUNDING

### 5.1 2018 Incentive funding

#### 5.1.1 Incentive grant-holders in 2017

Category	Incentive	Period of incentive
All grant-holders who received Incentive funding in 2017 irrespective of their rating and provided that they have a valid rating	*R30 000	Once-off grant over the duration of their NRF rating cycle

ALL valid "P" rated researchers irrespective of newly or current Incentive grant-holders	R50 000 per year	Annual grant for the duration of their NRF rating
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#### 5.1.2 Researchers who have never been rated before and whose rating starts on 1 January 2018

Category	Incentive	Period of incentive
ALL <u>newly</u> rated researchers (with no previous NRF valid rating) with rating categories "A" and "B"	*R50 000	Once-off grant over the duration of their NRF rating cycle
ALL <u>newly</u> rated researchers (with no previous NRF valid rating) with rating categories "C" and "Y"	*Two tranches of R30 000	Two grants over the duration of their NRF rating cycle

\*Researchers will have to indicate in the application form at the time of completing the form, when these funds will be required over the duration of their NRF rating cycle.

#### 5.1.3 Researchers who had a valid rating until 31 December 2017 or allowed their rating to lapse, who re-submitted and received a valid rating starting on 1 January 2018

Persons who re-submit for rating at the end of their current rating period and retain a rating	R30 000	Once-off grant over duration of their NRF rating
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#### 5.1.4 Improve rating in 2018

Researchers who improve their rating between main categories (i.e., Y to C/B; P to C/B/A; C to B and B to A and <b>not</b> between the sub categories within each of the broad categories, e.g., C3 to C2; C2 to C1; etc.)	R50 000	Once-off grant over the duration of their NRF rating
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### 5.2 2019 Incentive funding

#### 5.2.1 C and Y-rated Incentive grant-holders in 2017

Category	Incentive	Period of incentive
C and Y rated researchers who received Incentive funding in 2017 for the first time	*R30 000	Once-off grant

#### 5.2.2 P-rated Incentive grant-holders

ALL "P" rated researchers irrespective of newly or current Incentive grant-holders	R50 000 per year	Annual grant for the duration of the NRF rating cycle
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The Incentive and the period of the Incentive grant will remain unchanged from 2018 to 2019

### 5.3 Incentive grant-holders prior to 2018 (Summary of the above tables)

#### 5.3.1 2017 Incentive grant-holders

- All researchers who received Incentive funding only for one year in 2017 are eligible for R30 000 in 2018
- C-and Y-rated researchers will receive a further R30 000 in 2019, and will thereafter only be eligible to apply for Incentive funding after their application for re-rating has been approved
- These awards are subject to the same conditions that grant-holders signed when the 2017 Incentive grant was approved.

#### 5.3.2 Incentive grant-holders whose Incentive grant started prior to 2017

A, B, C and Y-rated researchers will receive R30 000 in 2018 only, and will be eligible to apply for Incentive funding after their application for re-rating has been approved.

## 6 FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

The allocated research funds are to be used strictly for research-related activities.

It will be awarded against running costs but can be used to cover the costs related to the items indicated in section 6.1 to 6.6 below.

This funding will fall under the NRF audit requirements of beneficiary institutions and grant holders' and institutions' Designated Authority will be required to sign the Conditions of Grant document before funds are released.

### 6.1 Student support

a) Should researchers allocate the funds towards a full bursary, they need to conform to the standard NRF rules for bursaries and the full commitment or study duration will need to be adhered to as detailed in the **Ministerial Guidelines for Improving Equity in the Distribution of DST/NRF Bursaries and Fellowships** (January 2013). The distribution for these bursaries is targeted at the ratios:

- Final year Undergraduate and Honours/BTech student assistantships: 100% SA citizens with a minimum ratio<sup>[1]</sup> of 1:1 for Black<sup>[2]</sup> and White participants (1 year);
- Masters bursaries (90% to South Africans and 10% to candidates from other African countries – 2 years)
- Doctoral bursaries (80:15:5, SA: Other African: Rest of the World – 3 years)
- Postdoctoral bursaries (Open to all who undertake research in South Africa – 2 years)

The equity distribution for these bursaries is targeted at the ratio:

- 80% Black o 55% Female o 4% Disabled

b) Researchers may award funds to a student as running funds since the Incentive funding grant do not have a nomination process.

### 6.2 Materials and Supplies

All research related running expenses

The NRF **does however, not** provide financial support for:

- Basic office stationery, photocopying costs, printing costs unless these items form part of the research tools or the applicant/team member is based at a museum.
- Journal publication costs, journal subscription costs, purchase book costs (unless the book is required for the research purposes) or the applicant/team member is based at a museum.

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<sup>[1]</sup> With the emphasis on Black students

<sup>[2]</sup> Inclusive of Africans, Indians and Coloureds

### **6.3 Travel and subsistence (for the Rated Researcher only. Funding requests for students to attend international conferences will not be considered)**

- International conference attendance
- International visits
- Local conference attendance
- Local travel

Actual travel expenses incurred and claimed in an academic year may be claimed even if the activity only takes place in the next year i.e. booking of air tickets and registration fees of a conference.

### **6.4 Research / Technical / Ad hoc Assistants**

- The NRF DOES NOT pay for any salaries or buy-out time for lecturing staff
- Researchers may remunerate an assistant when specific and/or highly specialized research/technical expertise is required.
- Administrative assistance DOES NOT qualify as technical assistance.

### **6.5 Equipment**

Researchers may use the funds for small equipment. All research equipment purchased through this Grant shall be registered in the Institution's asset register according to the policies of the Institution, and shall remain the property of the Institution on completion of the Grant.

### **6.6 Data Management**

Researcher may use part or all of the funds for data management and or support towards technical expert assistance.

### **6.7 Sabbatical**

Sabbaticals to other research organizations and institutions of higher learning

## **7 REPORTING**

### **7.1 Progress Reports**

Grant-Holders must report on how the funds were spent **by 15 February** of the subsequent year of funding at <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za> – Create Progress Report.

Grant-holders are requested to update their Research Outputs on their CVs on the NRF Online Submission System <https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za> before they create the Progress Report.

The outputs for the year of funding will be listed in the Progress Report and grant-holders will be able to select the ones they wish to have included in the relevant Progress Report.

**Failure to submit the progress report may result in future awards, grants and or release of other NRF funding and grants being withheld.**

For further enquiries please contact

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