



science and technology

Department:
Science and Technology
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



RISA
Research and Innovation
Support and Advancement

NRF-FRF Sabbatical Grant Framework

**Directorate: Human and Infrastructure Capacity
Development (HICD)**

Date: July 2017



Contents

1. Background	3
2. Aim	4
3. Objectives	4
4. Allocation Principles	4
5. Application Process	5
5.1 Call for Proposals	5
5.2 Call Requirements	5
5.3 Eligibility	6
5.3.1 Eligibility Criteria for applicants'	6
5.3.2 Doctoral Sabbatical Grant	6
5.3.3 Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant	7
6. Proposal Screening and Review	7
7. Funding Support	7
7.1 Award and Period of funding	7
7.2 Types of Financial Support	7
8. Conditions of award for the Sabbatical Grant	8
9. Reporting	9
10. NRF Contact Persons	11

1. Background

The National Research Foundation (NRF) and the FirstRand Foundation (FRF) have partnered to pursue the goal of increasing the proportion of suitably qualified Black (especially African) academic staff and academic staff with disabilities, at South African public universities, by establishing the NRF-FRF Sabbatical Grant funding instrument.

In the context of higher education, a doctoral qualification is a requirement for undertaking high quality research and supervising doctoral students. The production and support of emerging researchers, i.e. those that are on the path to becoming established researchers, is also a prerequisite to promote globally competitive research and innovation. The NRF therefore promotes the research development of emerging researchers, employed at South African public universities and other public research institutions, from the pre-doctoral level to the attainment an NRF rating.

The FRF is a leader in corporate social investment in the financial services sector and the organisation's investment in this initiative, is guided by one of its strategic intent to contribute to a strengthened economy and a better South Africa through Education and Skills development. The two parties entered into an agreement to support Black academics, particularly Black African males and females and, persons with disabilities, employed at public universities in South Africa to attain doctoral level qualifications and postdoctoral research training. This intervention will span a five-year period aiming to make twenty five awards per annum to doctoral candidates and, twenty five awards per annum to postdoctoral candidates.

A major barrier for advancing research and postgraduate training at South African universities is the low proportion of academic staff with the appropriate qualifications to drive postgraduate research and to advance knowledge creation. In 2009, only one third of full-time permanent academic staff (PAS) held doctoral degrees. Furthermore, there was a net decline in the number of full-time university academic staff with doctoral degrees at the universities and universities of technology over the same period. The impact of the low proportion of suitably qualified academic staff increases the "*burden of supervision*" for postgraduate supervisors (CHE, 2009). This burden of supervision, at both the masters and doctoral levels increased across all fields of science between 2000 and 2005. At the Masters level, the ratio increased from 3.8 to 5.2 students per supervisor; and at the doctoral level from 1.3 to 2.2 students per supervisor, over the six-year period. This funding instrument is an intervention that will contribute directly to one of the targets of the National Development Plan 2030 (*Vision 2030*), to have 75% of university academic staff with a doctoral level qualification by the year 2030.

In addition to the burden of postgraduate supervision among South African universities, transformation continues to remain a critical imperative in South Africa, particularly considering the ethnic and gender composition of key sectors of society such as universities. Of the 3 392 NRF rated researchers in South Africa, in 2015, only 26% were Black, and 31% were female. The cohort of black NRF rated researchers comprised of 16% African, 3% Coloured, and 7% Indian academics and researchers.

Black African South African citizens made up only 6% of the NRF rated researchers and only six (6) of these researchers achieved an NRF A rating. It is for this reason, that Black African participation in knowledge production and, transforming the profile of active Black researchers within the South African National System of Innovation (NSI) is a fundamental imperative.

It is argued that a lack of resources and teaching demands are the major challenges that limit the completion of doctoral degrees by academic staff and also limits them in undertaking postdoctoral research on the path to becoming established researchers. This sabbatical will therefore enable successful applicants to spend up to three (3) years undertaking full-time research to complete their doctoral degree or two (2) years of full-time postdoctoral research training.

2. Aim

This sabbatical grant is a directed intervention aimed at promoting the development of Black academics specifically, Black African South African citizens and, academic staff with disabilities, by accelerating the training of doctoral and postdoctoral candidates to enhance their research training and accelerate their progression to become established researchers.

3. Objectives

In light of the above, the objectives of the NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant funding instrument are to:

- Support academics, particularly South African Black African females and persons with disabilities, employed at public universities in South Africa to attain doctoral level qualification and postdoctoral research training;
- Promote the attainment of an NRF rating by South African Black African early-career academics especially, Black and female researchers and persons with disabilities.

4. Allocation Principles

The NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant supports well-structured research projects with achievable aims and sound methodologies which support the study's objectives and demonstrate the prudent use of funds. The selection of successful candidates for this grant will be guided by the principles outlined below.

Equity and redress: In keeping with the equity and transformation objectives of the country, the NRF-FRF Sabbatical Grant will support only South African citizens employed at public universities as full-time academics. The equity target for this funding instrument is to support, 90% Black African and 10% comprising of Indian, Coloured and persons with disabilities. Fifty five (55%) percent of all grants will be prioritised for female grantholders. However, in this

first call for applications, the NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant aims to support Black African, South African citizens and persons with disabilities.

Institutional spread: Ideally, two (2) awards per annum will be made to each university that submits applications. At least one (1) of the two (2) awards to each university will be for a candidate that is pursuing a doctoral degree.

Commitment to excellence: Even though the programme has a developmental focus, only quality proposals that are scientifically sound and obtain a favourable independent merit review will be considered for funding.

Achievability: The research proposal and individual's development plan must be realistic, i.e. achievable in terms of the research objectives, the resources required and the projected completion times.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Nomination: Only applications with a letter of nomination including a strong motivation from the DVC Research (or equivalent) at the university where the academic is employed, will be considered for the grant award.

Candidate's personal motivation: As this is a developmental programme, only applications with a well-motivated academic and research career plan, with intended outcomes will be considered for the grant award.

5. Application Process

5.1 Call for Proposals

The NRF issues a Call for Proposals for the NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant funding instrument annually. This Call will be accompanied by a detailed NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant Application and Funding Guide explaining the information to be included in the NRF Online application and the grant conditions and administration. Applicants' will be invited to apply for funding in one (1) of the following two (2) tracks:

- **Doctoral Sabbatical Grant:** for applicants registered for a doctoral; and
- **Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant:** for applicants intending to pursue postdoctoral research training.

5.2 Call Requirements

A maximum of eight (8) applications may be submitted by each South African public university in response to the call for applications. Of the eight (8) applications, at least four (4) must be for a doctoral Sabbatical Grant and the remainder may be for the Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant. Applicants' applying for a doctoral Sabbatical Grant may structure the application flexibly to either complete the doctoral degree in three (3) years or spend at least one (1) year completing the doctoral degree and the remaining period undertaking Postdoctoral research training.

University management is required to implement processes to ensure that the NRF receives complete and well-motivated applications, by the closing date. In this regard, universities are encouraged to form strategic partnerships with other universities for proposal development, co-supervision and/or support for emerging research development.

Each application must include the following two motivations as attachments to the application:

- A letter of nomination including a strong motivation from the DVC Research (or equivalent) at the university where the academic is employed. This letter of motivation must detail the reasons for nominating the candidate, the alignment with the university research and academic staffing plan and, any strategic partnership with other universities for proposal development, co-supervision and/or support for emerging research development.
- A self-motivation from the applicant detailing his/her academic and research career plan and the benefits and intended outcomes to be achieved from the sabbatical leave.

5.3 Eligibility

5.3.1 Eligibility Criteria for applicants'

The following general eligibility criteria for candidates are applicable **in this first call for applications** for the NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant awards:

- Applicants' must be African Black, South African citizens or South African citizens with disabilities;
- Applicants must hold a permanent, full-time academic appointment at one of the 26 public universities in South Africa;
- Applicants **must not** have received or, hold a valid NRF A, B, C, P or Y rating at the time of commencement of the sabbatical leave. Should an NRF Evaluation and Rating application and the NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant application be submitted simultaneously and both are successful, then the sabbatical grant will not be awarded.
- Individuals appointed as New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) scholars are not eligible to apply to this funding instrument.

5.3.2 Doctoral Sabbatical Grant

The following eligibility criteria will apply, **at the time of application**, in respect of the Doctoral Sabbatical Grant.

Applicants must:

- Be registered for a doctoral degree in any discipline;
- Not be older than forty (40) years of age;
- Have obtained a university Research and Higher Degrees Committee approval for the doctoral research proposal;

- Have obtained ethical clearance for the research proposal, if applicable; and
- Have the proposed doctoral research project, supported by the nominated supervisor.

5.3.3 Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant

The following eligibility criteria will apply, **at the time of application**, in respect of the Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant.

Applicants must:

- Not be older than forty five (45) years of age; and
- Have completed a doctoral degree within five (5) years of the time of application.

6. Proposal Screening and Review

Following the institutional and NRF screening processes, proposals that meet the eligibility criteria and application requirements will be subjected to peer-review to assess substantive issues such as scientific merit and any other pre-determined content criteria, as outlined in the Application and Funding Guide. Based on the outcomes of the review process, applications will either be eligible for funding or not.

Thereafter, a selection committee will consider the recommendations from the review process and assess the budget requests in order to make the final awards for successful sabbatical applications. The selection committee will comprise of representative from the NRF and FirstRand Foundation. Grant approvals and awards will be done in accordance with NRF auditing requirements.

7. Funding Support

7.1 Award and Period of funding

Successful applications will be awarded funding for a maximum period of:

- Three (3) years for the Doctoral Sabbatical Grant; and
- Two (2) years for the Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grant.

The release of continuation funding for the second and third year will be linked to the applicant's progress. The continuing grantholder will be required to submit a detailed Annual Progress Report (APR) to the NRF at the end of each academic year. Approved funding beyond the first year will only be released upon submission of the designated authority (DA) approved APR to the NRF.

7.2 Types of Financial Support

The NRF - FRF Sabbatical Grant will be funded within a set maximum amount range for each budget category, subject to budget availability, as outlined in the accompanying

Application and Funding Guide. The grant is intended to fund three (3) distinct budget categories:

- Lecturer replacement costs to a maximum value of two hundred thousand Rand (R200 000.00);
- Operational costs to a maximum value of one hundred thousand Rand (R100 000.00). Operational costs must be motivated and may include projected costs for the budget line items listed below:
 - Running Expenses, including necessary materials and supplies;
 - International Conferences (Travel and Subsistence)
 - Local Conferences (Travel and Subsistence)
 - Local Travel (Travel and Subsistence)
 - Small Research Equipment
 - Research/Technical/Ad Hoc Assistants;
- International mobility/visits to a maximum value of one hundred thousand Rand (R100 000.00). This is **only applicable to Postdoctoral Sabbatical Grants**.

Applicants with a disability as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA) may apply to the NRF for additional support for assistive devices following the approval of the grant award. 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*".

8. Conditions of award for the Sabbatical Grant

- Successful applicants will be required to sign a Conditions of Grant (CoG) with the NRF and the university.
- Should the grant holder discontinue with the sabbatical, the grant holder will inform the NRF in writing within 30 days prior to the exit of the sabbatical. This grant is non-transferable and will be cancelled within 30 days from the receipt of written official notification by the NRF, should the grant holder discontinue with the sabbatical.
- This grant may not be held concurrently with any other NRF sabbatical grant or scholarships.
- The grant may not be used for registration fees.
- This grant may be held with another NRF research grant, in accordance with the NRF multiple grants eligibility table. Where the grant holder receives multiple grants, sufficient evidence must be provided to demonstrate that the other grant will supplement the full research costs for the same project funded under the sabbatical grant.
- Applicants must spend 80% of their time each year on research related activities and, may not spend more than 20% of their time each year, on postgraduate teaching and supervision duties during the sabbatical period.
- Grant holders registered for a doctoral degree will be required to provide proof of doctoral graduation within one (1) year of the completion of the period of sabbatical leave.
- Postdoctoral candidates are expected to complete the sabbatical within the two-year period.

- All sabbatical grantholders must submit an Annual Progress Report (APR) and a final report indicating the nature (e.g. journal article, book chapter, book) and quality (e.g. impact factor of journal) of outputs produced, grant applications prepared and/or submitted within one-year of completion of the three-year sabbatical.
- Upon completion of the sabbatical leave, grantholders will be required to continue working at any South African public university or research institution or, at a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) for a maximum period of three (3) years or an equivalent period of the sabbatical leave.
- Should a grantholder discontinue or fail to successfully complete his or her Doctoral studies, resign from the employ of a South African public university or research institution or CSO before completion of their funded degree, or not finish his or her in-service payback period, he/she will be required to repay the full grant amount, or in the case of not finishing his or her in-service payback period pay a pro-rata grant amount, with zero percent interest to the NRF. Under such instances the grantholder will enter into an acknowledgement of debt with the NRF
- The maximum period for repayments will be equal to the duration of the grant and will start as soon as the discontinuation is registered with the NRF.
- There will be special provision made in the event of ill-health, maternity and bereavement leave. The grantholder shall inform the NRF no later than a week of any of these occurrences. The sabbatical grant payment will be deferred while the individual is on paid maternity leave, or extended sick or special leave exceeding two calendar months.

9. Reporting

For continuous monitoring of progress, the grantholders will be required to submit the reports outlined below, in a format provided by the NRF, against deliverables as outlined in the application form and the signed Conditions of Grant.

- Grantholders are required to submit an APR on the NRF Online submission system that is endorsed by the university DVC (Research) or equivalent and co-signed by the doctoral supervisor or Postdoctoral mentor.
- In cases of international visits where the grantholder is hosted by someone who is not their doctoral supervisor or Postdoctoral mentor, a report from the international host, must be submitted after each visit to the applicants' institution and attached to the APR submitted to the NRF.
- After the final visit by the visiting mentor, reports by both the host and the mentees must to be submitted to the institution and attached to the APR when submitting to the NRF.
- Doctoral Sabbatical grantholders will be required to provide proof of doctoral graduation within one (1) year of the completion of the period of sabbatical leave or doctoral degree in the case of a combined Doctoral and Postdoctoral sabbatical grant.
- All grantholders will be required to submit a final report at the end of the two (2) - or three (3) - year funding period indicating the impact of the sabbatical on the

grantholders research track record and academic standing.

- Postdoctoral Sabbatical candidates are expected to complete within the two(2) - year period and must submit a final report indicating the nature (e.g. journal article, book chapter, and book) and quality (e.g. impact factor of journal) of outputs produced, grant applications prepared and/or submitted within one (1) - year of completion of the sabbatical period.

10. NRF Contact Persons

For funding instrument related enquiries, please contact:

Ms Maphuti Madiga

Professional Officer: Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development (HICD)

Telephone: 012 481 4150.

E-mail: maphuti.madiga@nrf.ac.za

Application process and management and administration queries, please contact

Ms Zikhona Lose

Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration

Telephone: (012) 481 4365

E-mail address: zikhona.lose@nrf.ac.za

Technical online queries, please contact the NRF Support Desk during office hours

Telephone: (012) 481 4034

E-mail address: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

END