

A close-up photograph of a microscope's objective lenses, showing the number '5' on one of them. The image is set against a background of blue and red geometric shapes.

2017/18

**Overview of NRF Funding Opportunities,
Grant Management and the Rating
of Researchers**





Research..



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Disclaimer

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

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACEP	African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme	KFDG	Knowledge Fields Development Grants
AOP	African Origins Platform	KIC	Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration
BFG	Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics	MCDM	Multi-criteria Decision Model
CNRS	French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)	MWGR	Human Capital Development for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy Grants
CoE	Centres of Excellence	Mintek	Council for Mineral Technology
COMG	Community Engagement Grants	NEP	National Research Equipment Programme
CSUR	Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers	NFP	Nanotechnology Flagships Project
DA	Designated Authority	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service	nGAP	New Generation of Academics Programme
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	NNEP	National Nanotechnology Equipment Programme
DEAT	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism	NNS	National Nanotechnology Strategy
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training	NRF	National Research Foundation
DST	Department of Science and Technology	NSI	National System of Innovation
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry	NZG	National Zoological Gardens
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor	PD	Postdoctoral
ERC	European Research Council	PDP	Professional Development Programme
ERGR	Education Research in South African Grants	PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
ERP	Energy Research Programme	RE	Reviews and Evaluation Directorate
ERTTG	Equipment-related Travel and Training Grants	RISA	Research and Innovation Support and Advancement
FBIP	Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme	RTF	Research and Technology Fund
GCRP	Global Change Research Plan	SA	South Africa
GCSSRP	Global Change, Society and Sustainability Research Programme	SAASTA	South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement
GMSA	Grants Management and Systems Administration	SAAO	South African Astronomical Observatory
HartRAO	Hartebeesthoek Radio Astronomy Observatory	SABI	South African Biosystematics Initiative
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Institution	SAEON	South African Environmental Observation Network
HEI	Higher Education Institution	SAIAB	South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity
IFI	Infrastructure Funding Instruments	SANAP	South African National Antarctic Programme
IFRR	Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers	SANSA	South African National Space Agency
IISA	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis	SARChI	South African Research Chairs Initiative
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems	SC	Specialist Committee
iThemba LABS	iThemba Laboratory for Accelerator Based Sciences	STEM	Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematical Sciences
KAT	Karoo Array Telescope	SMME	Small, medium or micro enterprise
KFD	Knowledge Fields Development	SKA	Square Kilometre Array
		TWAS	TWAS

1. INTRODUCTION

This booklet is intended to provide readers with a resource that will enable them to navigate the research funding landscape of the National Research Foundation (NRF). Readers will find this a useful tool for interacting with the Institution, in order to access the numerous funding opportunities available to the research community. The booklet should be read in conjunction with other resources, such as the NRF website (www.nrf.ac.za) and publications such as the NRF Annual Report, business plans and funding instrument-specific guides and frameworks. It should be noted that more information pertaining to bursaries, scholarships and fellowships can be found in the following booklet: *NRF Bursary, Scholarships Value Rules and Guidelines*. In addition, general enquiries can be directed by e-mail to: info@nrf.ac.za and grant-related enquiries to: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za.

2. MANDATE

The mandate of the NRF is to “Support and promote research through funding, human resource development and the provision of the necessary research facilities in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology including indigenous knowledge and thereby to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of all the people of the Republic”.

This mandate translates into the Vision 2020 Strategic Plan of the NRF, which is available at: <http://www.nrf.ac.za/about-nrf/vision>. The mandate applies to the three organisational arms of the NRF, namely:

1. National Research Facilities, which are custodians of large pieces of scientific equipment or large collections of data and specimens. These resources are for the use of researchers across the country. Descriptions of these facilities can be found at: www.nrf.ac.za/
2. Research and Innovation Support and Advancement (RISA), which is a grant and knowledge management unit. This booklet focuses almost entirely on the activities of RISA and specifically on the award of research grants, as well as the benchmarking of research quality through the rating system.
3. The South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) aims to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering and technology in South Africa. SAASTA is a Business Unit of the NRF.

3. INVESTMENT PRINCIPLES

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

1. Awarding funding on a competitive basis;
2. A healthy balance between strategy-driven versus demand-pull funding;
3. Merit-based and rigorous peer review;
4. PhD as a driver;
5. Cross-fertilisation of talent within the National System of Innovation (NSI);
6. Effective, goal-oriented resource allocation;
7. Fairness, transparency and accountability; and
8. Transformation and excellence.

The NRF has identified five broad investment areas, which are listed in Table 1. The 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.

Table 1: Broad investment areas of the NRF

Next Generation
Emerging Researchers
Established Researchers
Strategic Investments

4. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The wide range of funding opportunities of the NRF is dynamic and, therefore, subject to change. Researchers are advised to visit the NRF website at www.nrf.ac.za regularly for notifications of changes and updates on the current status of the respective funding instruments. A list of the current major funding opportunities is provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2: List of funding opportunities

Broad Investment Area	Funding Instruments
NEXT GENERATION	Sabbatical Grants for Completing a Doctoral Degree
	Student Support (Free-standing Scholarships and Fellowships, Block Grants and Grantholder-linked Scholarships)
	Thuthuka: PhD Track
	nGAP PhD Track
EMERGING RESEARCHERS	Collaborative Postgraduate Training Programme
	DAAD/NRF Scholarship Programme
	Nanotechnology Flagships Project for Emerging Researchers
	nGAP Post PhD Track
	Postdoctoral Fellowships
	Professional Development Programme
	Research Career Advancement Fellowships
	Thuthuka: Post-PhD Track
	Thuthuka: NRF Rating Track
	World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) Postgraduate Scholarships and Fellowships



ESTABLISHED RESEARCHERS	African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme
	African Origins Platform
	Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics
	Blue Skies Research
	Centres of Excellence
	Community Engagement Programme
	Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers
	Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers
	Education Research in South Africa
	Energy Research Programme
	Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme
	Global Change, Society and Sustainability Research Programme
	Human and Social Sciences Grants
	Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers
	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
	Knowledge Fields Development Grants
	Research and Technology Fund
	SABI-KFD South African Biosystematics Initiative
	SA National Antarctic Programme
Y Rated Researchers	
STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS	Africa Bilateral Programmes Bilaterals and Multilaterals
	Conference Fund
	Equipment-related Travel and Training Grants
	Human Capital Development for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy
	Infrastructure Funding Instruments
	International Research Grants
	Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration
	Mobility and Special projects
	Overseas Bilateral Programmes
	Strategic projects
	Southern African Systems Analysis Centre
	South African Research Chairs Initiative

4.1 Student Support

The NRF supports students, mainly at postgraduate level, in the following three ways:

- Free-standing scholarships for which students apply online and compete individually on merit; Grantholder-linked bursaries, which are awarded to grantholders in their field of research, with the grantholder being responsible for selecting the most appropriate and worthy students for the bursaries; and
- Block grants, where the institution nominates the student or fellow for the grant based on a set of selection criteria provided by the NRF.

Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded to applicants of different nationalities, based on a pre-determined quota, and the awarded funds have to be utilised in South Africa. Depending on the funding instrument, South Africans and permanent residents may conduct their research at international institutions. A Postdoctoral Fellowship appointment should preferably be at a university other than the university at which the candidate obtained their Doctorate. Exceptions may be considered, based on a motivation submitted with the application for the Fellowship.

Refer to the Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) booklet of the NRF: **2017–18 NRF Bursary & Scholarship Values, Rules and Guidelines for Funding Opportunities.**

4.2 Overarching Grant Criteria

The overarching eligibility criteria that apply to the majority of RISA research grants are summarised below:

- All researchers who are employed and remunerated on a full-time permanent or full-time contract basis at institutions, as defined in **Table 3**.
- Persons from institutions not listed in **Table 3**, who conduct research and are formally affiliated with one of the institutions as defined for each specific funding instrument in **Table 3** (e.g. appointed as a visiting professor). In the case of grant funding, the funds will be paid to the affiliated institution.
- Retired academics/researchers who are:
 - o Residing in South Africa;
 - o Formally affiliated (e.g. appointed as an emeritus professor, honorary research associate/professor, supernumerary/contract employee) with a research institution, as defined in **Table 3**, and whose application is formally supported and endorsed by the institution with which they are affiliated, or anticipate to be affiliated;
 - o Active researchers with a distinguished track record of research and postgraduate student supervision and;
 - o Still actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff.

4.2.1 Research-intensive Institutions

The NRF primarily supports research-intensive institutions conducting basic or applied research of a pre-competitive nature for the benefit of the long-term knowledge base. The institutions must also be committed to human resource capacity development, including equity and redress. The institutions supported by the NRF through its funding instruments and rating programme are listed in **Table 3**.

4.2.2 Student Training

The quality of all applications for funding is greatly enhanced if the applicant has a track record of student training, although this is not always an eligibility requirement.

4.2.3 Foreign Applicants

Persons, who hold a joint appointment at a South African and a foreign institution and who are actively involved in research capacity building in South Africa, are eligible for a RISA research grant, provided that they are employed by the South African institution in a full-time capacity for a period of at least six months per annum and spend at least six months annually in South Africa.

5. INSTRUMENT-SPECIFIC ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following is an overview of the criteria for research grants in the various funding instruments offered by the NRF (excluding Student Support). The proposed work must constitute research as defined by the NRF and be aligned with the strategy of the relevant funding instrument. For more information, refer to the relevant framework and guidelines at: www.nrf.ac.za

5.1 Africa Bilateral Programmes

The NRF has a number of joint research programmes with African countries. Support for these programmes depends on agreed areas of cooperation, including human capital development and research. Current active and future programmes include bilateral projects with Angola, Algeria, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana, Kenya, Uganda, Egypt, Tanzania, Tunisia and Sudan. The Principal Investigator brings different and complementary perspectives, knowledge and/or skills to the project. In addition, an applicant for these grants must be engaged in research with a collaborator in a country that is a signatory to a bi-national or bilateral agreement between the NRF and a funding agency in that country.

5.2 African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP)

The African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP) is a research platform that aims to provide access to research infrastructure (e.g. ship's time, remote operated vehicles, dive teams, etc.) and associated funding for the research community to undertake research along the east coast of South Africa.

5.3 African Origins Platform (AOP) Strategy

The African Origins Platform (AOP) Strategy provides direction for a holistic approach towards the development of palaeo-sciences and related disciplines. This strategy addresses issues of public engagement, human resources, challenges faced by universities and museums as research institutions and repositories for collections, as well as the legal landscape and tourism development in palaeo-sciences.

5.4 Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics (BFG)

The Bioinformatics and Functional Genomics (BFG) funding instrument is a DST contract-funded instrument, the aim of which is to support bioinformatics applications in biotechnology projects in line with national priorities, as set out in the South African Biotechnology Strategy and the Ten Year Innovation Plan. The instrument provides support on an open and competitive basis for both research grants and bursaries at postgraduate level.

5.5 Blue Skies Research Programme

The Blue Skies Research Programme is a highly competitive funding instrument that aims to bring about new and unpredictable scientific/technological/scholarly discoveries. It provides the space for novel fundamental

inquiry that can be described as multi-dimensional, self-initiated and curiosity-driven, necessitating high investment risks, addressing new phenomena and pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge. Blue Skies research is associated with fundamental and basic research programmes and should be considered as a multi-dimensional concept that can be defined from various perspectives – namely that of the researcher, the funding agency, the object of the research, the research approach and/or the contribution to the knowledge base.

5.6 Conference Fund

The Conference Fund is intended to support the hosting of international conferences that focus on excellent scientific research with the potential for socio-economic impact. The funding platform makes provision for strategic, large events of an international nature, hosted in South Africa, or on behalf of South Africa abroad.

5.7 Centres of Excellence (CoE)

The applicant must be an established researcher and hold a Doctorate and 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 and have an excellent and extended track record of research outputs.

5.8 Collaborative Postgraduate Training

The objectives set out in the South African Human Resource Development Strategy (2012–2030) on developing and increasing the number of skilled personnel in science, engineering and technology are a clear indication of the commitment of the country to research, development and innovation in science and technology. The supporting platforms for the realisation of these human resource development objectives, as stipulated in the programme-specific DST strategies, require the following three critical areas for successful implementation:

- **Human capital:** The development of appropriate expertise and skills will receive particular attention, because without these, all existing and envisaged programmes and infrastructure will be unsuccessful;
- **Infrastructure:** Appropriate infrastructure is the cornerstone of an effective training programme, enabling technology transfer and human capacity development initiatives; and
- **International partnerships:** Strategic partnerships with foreign partners are necessary for tangible and intangible technology transfer and a viable and sustainable human capital development programme.

The postgraduate training programmes should ideally be inter-university partnerships and/or public-private partnerships with government, industry and universities – with an emphasis on historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) – all working together toward a common objective to produce and sustain a growing stream of well-rounded postgraduates to address national needs.

5.9 Community Engagement Programme

The Community Engagement Programme is a competitive funding instrument providing the space for research that contributes to both knowledge production within the ambit of community engagement (where “community” being defined in its broadest sense), as well as to research on the processes and dynamics of engagement from the perspective of the higher education sector. This funding instrument is aimed at supporting and providing enabling conditions for higher education institutions (HEIs) to take on some of the philosophical and conceptual challenges associated with the dynamics of community engagement and social responsiveness as a field of research inquiry.

5.10 Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers (CPRR)

The Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers is a discipline-based funding instrument that mainly supports basic research as the foundation of knowledge production in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences.

As a competitive funding instrument, the main eligibility criteria are:

- The current NRF rating of the principal applicant; and
- The scientific merit of the research proposal.

5.11 Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR)

The aim of this funding instrument is to provide research support to researchers working in any research field, who do not, for a variety of reasons, hold a current NRF rating and who are not participating in any of the NRF capacity development funding instruments.

The strategic objectives of CSUR are to:

- Strengthen the research base of the nation;
- Increase the research outputs of the nation; and
- Support the training of postgraduate students.

5.12 DAAD Scholarship Programme

The NRF and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) In-Country Scholarship Programme supports South African citizens undertaking Masters and Doctorates (and permanent residents employed at South African institutions – only at doctoral level) at South African universities. Both the Masters and Doctoral support cover all subject areas with strong relevance to national development (including the applied social sciences, environmental and other special areas of law, but excluding the pure humanities and fine arts).

5.13 Education Research in South Africa

The Call for proposals funding for Education Research in South Africa seeks research proposals that adhere to the entry-level hurdles outlined below.

The research must address:

- The overarching theme of “Teaching and learning interactions that shape the qualitative outcomes of education” at all levels of the education and training system;
- National priorities in South Africa (a strong indication must be provided); and
- Systemic implications (either through large-scale empirical research or meta-analyses of past/existing small-scale research projects).

Only proposals submitted by consortia will be accepted. Consortia members must reflect the following minimum conditions:

- Multi-institutional collaboration among at least three different institutions in South Africa, with at least one representing a rural-based institution; and
- Multi-disciplinary backgrounds.

5.14 Energy Research Programme (ERP)

The DST has developed and has started the roll-out of a collaborative model that recognises and supports the distribution of research capacity and expertise for a defined focus area, across more than one institution and/or divisions of an institution.

The various institutions are assigned areas of focus and responsibility within the broader defined focus area, preferably within their individual areas of pre-existing competencies, capacities, expertise and specialisation. One institution is selected as the coordinating point (the Hub) and the rest are the Spokes. A hub-and-spokes cluster may have any number of spokes and these may be added as the need arises, for example if new sub-focus areas not yet catered for, are realised. These hubs and spokes are mainly expected to focus on applied research with a goal of ensuring that South Africa stays abreast with the latest technologies and research in a specific focus area. The hubs and spokes are also critical to realising the objectives of human capital development.

The first hub-and-spokes cluster has been established to contribute to the key strategic area of energy security, with the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies at Stellenbosch University serving as the hub with three spokes focusing on wind, solar thermal and solar photovoltaic renewable energy respectively, located at five paired universities, which include the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, University of Fort Hare and the University of Pretoria.

5.15 Equipment-related Travel and Training Grants (ERTTG)

Through mobility grants, the NRF makes funds available for both national and international travel, in order to support researchers who require access to equipment that is not available regionally and/or nationally. The mobility grants are divided into two portfolios of opportunities, namely equipment-related travel grants and equipment-related training grants. This funding is available to researchers based at institutions, as defined in Table 3 in order to support:

- The larger research community to access state-of-the-art equipment that is not readily available regionally and/or nationally;
- Researchers and postgraduate students in South Africa to access global research infrastructure, such as synchrotron radiation facilities;
- Research institutions hosting training workshops on the use of specialised equipment that is acquired through NRF equipment grants;
- The larger research community to access training workshops on the use of specialised equipment that is acquired through NRF equipment grants; and
- The larger research community to access training workshops on the use of specialised equipment, not necessarily obtained through NRF grants, but clearly feeder equipment that is complementary to that acquired through NRF equipment grants.

The NRF encourages the local design and development of the next generation of research equipment in South Africa. Therefore, institutions are encouraged to apply for support in accessing training on the design, procurement, construction, testing and certification of novel research equipment.

5.16 Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP)

The primary focus of the Programme is to generate, mobilise, coordinate and make accessible foundational biodiversity knowledge in line with the needs of society, the DST Global Change Programme and the bio-econ-

omy. The main approach is to fund large, collaborative/integrated team projects, which align with knowledge needs or which involve participants along the entire value chain from knowledge generation to application for decision-making. These projects will also include postgraduate students and emerging researchers and the up-skilling of researchers and practitioners who use the generated data. The projects will generate or mobilise species occurrence data, DNA barcode data and descriptive information on species and will ensure that the knowledge is coordinated, managed and disseminated through appropriate structures and systems. Monitoring the uptake and impact of the knowledge generated will allow the development of an understanding of best practice for ensuring that research outputs do have an impact on global change understanding and decision-making relating to biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods.

5.17 Global Change, Society and Sustainability Research Programme (GCSSRP)

The GCRP is one of the five Grand Challenges underpinning the “10-Year Innovation Plan” of the DST. More information on the Global Change Grand Challenge, the associated Research Plan and the implementation architecture can be found at the following link: <http://www.globalchange.grandchallengeonline.org/>

The GCSSRP is a long-term, large-scale structured and coordinated research funding instrument that will be implemented to address the identified fundamental research questions and provide research-based evidence required for socio-economic development, sustainability and social cohesion. This funding instrument will also offer a unique opportunity to bring together a variety of role-players in the area of social-ecological research, enhance their capacity and capability to respond to climate and environmental change and, in effect, encourage and enhance interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving.

5.18 Horizon 2020 European Research Council (ERC)

This Programme is intended for South African post-doctoral researchers (and permanent residents working at South African universities) supported by the NRF Research Career Advancement Fellowships, Postdoctoral Research Fellowships and Thuthuka post-PhD funding tracks interested in undertaking research visits to ERC-supported teams in similar areas of scientific pursuit and on topics of mutual interest.

5.19 Human Capital Development for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy

Any researcher at a South African HEI or national research facility can apply for funds from this funding instrument, provided that they are working under the rubric of multi-wavelength astronomy, including optical and gamma-ray astronomy and the supporting theory.

Researchers, who are eligible for funding from the SKA/KAT, are required to use that funding instrument for human capital development, as the Multi-Wavelength Astronomy funding instrument is not intended to support radio astronomy.

5.20 Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers (IFRR)

The Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers funding instrument was created with the aim of incentivising excellent research. The collateral objectives of the funding instrument include encouraging researchers to:

- Subject themselves for rating;
- Maintain their ratings; and
- Attain ever higher ratings, until they reach the top rating (A1).

Refer to the rating categories at the following link: <http://www.nrf.ac.za/>

5.21 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Applicants must respond to one of the following funding instruments:

- IKS and Bio-economy (African Traditional Medicine, Food Security or Cosmetics);
- IKS Epistemology (Ubuntu and Cosmology; or Taxonomies, Pedagogies, Methodologies);
- IKS and Climate Change;
- IKS and Energy;
- IKS Practices of the Khoi, Nama, Griqua and San communities; and/or
- Novel and creative thinking that will shift the boundaries of IKS knowledge production and address national priorities in South Africa.

Joint and active participation and equal ownership among academic scientists and IKS holders/practitioners/community members must be evident in the application (either as the principal investigator or co-investigator).

5.22 Infrastructure Funding Instruments (IFI)

The purpose of the Infrastructure Funding Instruments is to support the acquisition, maintenance and development of state-of-the-art research equipment. Support through the National Equipment Programme (NEP) is intended for researchers from South African HEIs, national research institutions, such as museums, science councils, national research facilities and other government-funded laboratories, including research hospitals.

The main criteria for consideration for funding applications are as follows:

- Scientific merit of the proposed research;
- Human resource capacity development;
- Regional and national collaboration with other institutions and industry;
- Effective sustainable utilisation of the equipment;
- Appropriate maintenance of the investment; and
- Appropriate training of technical staff for diagnostic, maintenance and application purposes.

5.23 Knowledge Fields Development Grants (KFDG)

The Knowledge Fields Development Directorate identifies and coordinates a number of knowledge field development activities for implementation each year. These activities are supported by means of once-off, short-term grants. It is only under very special circumstances that additional support will be made available for development of the same initiative. Setting priorities for activities is done through either a directed or non-directed approach. The directed approach involves activities that are aligned with national strategic priorities that may be identified internally by the NRF or in collaboration with the research community. The non-directed approach involves activities identified and coordinated by the research community itself and funded by KFD.

5.24 Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (KIC)

The KIC funding instrument offers researchers an opportunity to apply for funding for local or international travel; grants to host an event such as a conference or symposium; and mobility grants to support local or international travel for research visits. The guidelines for funding within the KIC instrument, which are usually published twice per annum, are available on the NRF website at: <http://www.nrf.ac.za/>

5.25 Nanotechnology Flagships Project (NFP) for Emerging Researchers

This funding instrument, which is in its third funding cycle, will be awarding development grants to early-career researchers in the fields of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology for a three-year period.

The primary focus of research projects supported by this funding instrument is to demonstrate the benefits of Nanotechnology and its impact on some of the key challenges facing South Africa. The NFP portfolio spans the spectrum of the national research agenda by focusing on the following key priority areas as identified in the National Nanotechnology Strategy (NNS):

- Energy Security;
- Improved Healthcare;
- Water Purification;
- Mining and Minerals; and
- Advanced Materials and Manufacturing.

In addition, the NFP addresses the strategic imperatives set forth in the NNS and other national strategies such as the National Research and Development Strategy of 2002.

Therefore, the NFP geared towards achieving the following objectives:

- Ensuring the development of human resource capacity that focuses on HDIs, women and persons with disabilities;
- Accelerating national efforts in order to build excellence in research and development capacity;
- Attracting and retaining young scientists and professionals of the highest calibre;
- Supporting young scientists and professionals in basic and applied research;
- Promoting and stimulating innovation in the form of proof of concept and/or patents; and
- Creating transparency, public awareness and acceptance of nanotechnology.

5.26 New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP)

The Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET's) Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) that presents a "comprehensive, transformative approach to developing future generations of academics and building staff capacity." The SSAUF has a focus on both research and teaching development to ensure that academics who are supported through programmes in the framework acquire training and mentoring over the full spectrum of academic roles.

The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) is one of SSAUF's four core programmes linked to the academic development pathway, and a cross-cutting support programme.

- New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) will recruit new academics against carefully designed and balanced equity considerations and in disciplinary areas of greatest need. The nGAP scholars will comprise of masters and doctoral candidates and postdoctoral emerging researchers appointed against new academic positions that will be created.

This Programme focuses on the nGAP staff to facilitate complementary support from the DHET and the Department of Science and Technology – National Research Foundation (DST-NRF) through the developmental stages of GAP scholars."

5.27 Overseas Bilateral Programmes

The NRF launches a number of bilateral programmes with overseas countries. Support for these programmes depends on agreed areas of cooperation, including human capital development and research. Current active bilateral programmes include:

- **Asia:** China, India, Taiwan and Japan;
- **Europe:** Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Newton Fund);
- **Gulf States:** Iran and Oman; and
- **South America:** Brazil and Argentina.

The Principal Investigator brings different and complementary perspectives, knowledge and/or skills to the project. In addition, an applicant for these grants must be engaged in research with a collaborator in a country that is a signatory to a bi-national or bilateral agreement between the NRF and a funding agency in that country.

5.28 Professional Development Programme (PDP)

The PDP is aimed at creating an opportunity for research institutions such as science councils, national research facilities and museums to attract, retain and train young scientists and professionals within their strategic research programmes and projects. Candidates will be exposed to a work pre-preparation programme that will allow them to obtain and further develop research experience and skills by working and contributing directly towards their host's research project/s. Candidates are required to be working towards obtaining either a doctoral qualification or postdoctoral research experience within their research field and contributing to the NSI.

5.29 Research Career Advancement Fellowships¹

These Fellowships are aimed at providing support for the training of individuals for research leadership in all areas of Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematical Sciences (STEM) at public universities. These fellowships may be held in partnership with a public research institution, such as a science council, a national research facility or an academic health complex. The fellowships are not pre-allocated to institutions and candidates must apply individually at the NRF. The applications must bear the endorsement of the university Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for research or equivalent. There is no restriction on the number of Research Career Advancement Fellowships that may be awarded to a single institution. The fellows must undertake research that is aligned with national and institutional research priorities. They are expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time to conducting research and supervising and mentoring postgraduate students. Successful candidates can receive support for full-time research for a period of five years.

The objectives of the Research Career Advancement Fellowships are to:

- Provide career a career path for postdoctoral researchers to pursue a career in research;
- Create the opportunity for these emerging researchers to be mentored and groomed for research leadership and academic positions;
- Create the opportunity for senior postdoctoral researchers to strengthen their research track record in their chosen research area and to establish themselves as independent researchers;
- Create the opportunity for these emerging researchers to gain experience in postgraduate training;
- Effect a transformation in the demographic composition of established researchers in South Africa, with respect to race, gender and persons with disabilities; and
- Develop a cohort of potential candidates for the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI).

¹ This Programme is being phased out and the NRF has committed to fund grantees who are currently funded until the end of their funding period.

- Fellows can also apply to the NRF-ERC call for proposal (**refer to Section 5.18**)

5.30 Research and Technology Fund (RTF)

The RTF is a fund provided by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), managed by the NRF, to fund research and related human capacity development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. There are two types of funding models, namely: (i) Co-Funding (CoFM) and (ii) Competitive Funding (CompFM). The primary difference between the two funding models is that, in the case of CoFM, at least one industrial partner should be co-funding the project and may define the research topic and focus, whereas in the CompFM, the project may be funded from the RTF alone, but the research topic and focus will be informed by the RTF priorities.

An RTF project must:

- Be of a high quality agriculture/forestry/fisheries and/or technology research/systems development, of which the outputs should make a significant contribution towards improving the industrial partner's competitive edge/agricultural entity's social stability;
- Have clearly defined scientific and/or technology and/or appropriate systems outputs;
- Lead to development of a prototype (product, process and technique, methodology) to benefit the industry partners/targeted communities;
- Lead to the creation and transfer of new knowledge into a process or product (prototype), or the transfer of existing knowledge into a new process or product to benefit the needs of small-holder farmers; and
- Provide support for professional development and small-holder technology needs.

5.31 Sabbatical Grants for Completion of Doctoral Degrees

This funding instrument is a special intervention aimed at addressing the decline in the number of full-time university academic staff with doctorates and the inadequate supervisory capacity that currently characterises the South African academic landscape. As a direct response, it seeks to accelerate the training of doctoral candidates, in order to improve the qualifications of employed academics and enhance their research and supervisory capacity. In recognition of the inhibiting role of limited funds in the creation of a vibrant academic milieu, this intervention is aimed at addressing this problem for individuals in the final stages of their doctoral studies.

In light of the foregoing information, the aims of the grant are to:

- Accelerate the doctoral level training of full-time academic staff at public universities and research institutions;
- Improve the academic qualifications of employed academics in order to enhance research and supervisory capacity; and
- Effect a rapid transformation in the demographic composition of the emerging researcher community with respect to gender, race and persons with disabilities.

5.32 South African National Antarctic Programme (SANAP)

The SANAP supports research in the Southern Ocean, including the Southern Ocean islands (Marion Island, Prince Edward Island and Gough Island) and Antarctica. The funding instrument supports research in the fields of Earth Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Life Sciences, Oceanographic Sciences, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences (Law and Humanities).

5.33 South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI)

SARChI is a strategic intervention of the South African government designed to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African universities. It is particularly aimed at increasing scientific research capacity by developing human capacity and stimulating the generation of new knowledge. It is also intended to support the realisation of the South African transformation to a knowledge economy in which the generation of knowledge translates into socio-economic benefits.

In order to apply for a Research Chair, an applicant must:

- Be an established researcher;
- Hold a PhD or an equivalent research qualification;
- Have a research track record that is excellent and sustained and on a clear upward trajectory for more than four years;
- Have a track record of supervising and mentoring postgraduate students;
- Have a track record of being able to obtain external funding; and
- Reside on a full-time basis in South Africa for the duration of the Research Chair award.

5.34 Southern African Systems Analysis Centre (SASAC) PhD Programme

The SASAC PhD Programme aims at providing an opportunity for excellent young doctoral students to advance research using a systems analysis methodology. Selected students are under the direct supervision of senior scientists from South African research institutions and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). An annual call for proposals for PhD students is launched.

5.35 Thuthuka

The Thuthuka funding instrument is central to the NRF's human capital development strategy for advancing the equity and redress agenda within the research sphere. Operating within the evolving higher education landscape, Thuthuka aims to develop human capital and to improve the research capacities of designated researchers (black [African, Indian or Coloured], female or persons with disabilities) with the ultimate aim of redressing historical imbalances. This is done in partnership with publicly funded higher education institutions, science councils and other publicly funded research institutions.

Thuthuka is managed in the following three different funding tracks, targeting different research capacity development needs:

- PhD Track for applicants who intend to obtain a PhD within the funding period;
- Post-PhD Track for applicants who intend to become established researchers by strengthening their research capabilities; and
- NRF Rating Track for applicants who would like to apply for NRF rating within the funding period.

5.36 World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) Postgraduate Fellowship Programme

This Fellowship Programme supports postgraduate students interested in studying and conducting research in South African universities. The Programme contributes to building human capacity that supports the positioning of the country for global competitiveness and emergence as an economic power.

The following fellowships are offered:

- **PhD Fellowships:** 20 students per annum from developing countries outside Africa and endorsed by TWAS

members in their country of origin are funded to pursue three years full-time PhD studies in South Africa.

- **Postdoctoral Fellowships:** 10 fellows per annum from developing countries outside Africa and endorsed by TWAS members in their country of origin are funded to pursue full-time research activities in the fields of natural sciences in South Africa for the duration of six months to three years.
- **African Renaissance PhD Fellowships:** 50 students per annum who are permanent residents in a developing African country and endorsed by TWAS members in their country of origin are funded to pursue full-time postgraduate fellowships leading to PhD studies in different fields of study in South Africa for the duration of up to three years.

Table 3: Institutions supported by the NRF funding and rating opportunities

Investment area	Funding Instrument	South African HEIs (publicly funded)	South African science councils	Museums (publicly funded)	National Research Facilities	Publicly funded research institutions	Private HEIs operating in SA	HEIs from other countries	NRF-approved NGOs	Private sector companies
EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUALS		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
NEXT GENERATION	Sabbatical Grants for Completion of Doctoral Degrees	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Student Support (Free-standing Scholarships and Fellowships, Block Grants and Grantholder-linked Scholarships)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
	Thuthuka: PhD Track	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
EMERGING RESEARCHERS	Collaborative Postgraduate Training Programme	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	DAAD / NRF Scholarship Programme	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Nanotechnology Flagships Project	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
	Postdoctoral Fellowships	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
	Professional Development Programme	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Research Career Advancement Fellowships	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Thuthuka: Post-PhD Track	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Thuthuka: NRF Rating Track	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
TWAS Postgraduate Fellowship	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N	

ESTABLISHED RESEARCHERS	African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	African Origins Platform	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Bioinformatics & Functional Genomics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	L
	Blue Skies Research	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Community Engagement Programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
	Education Research in South Africa	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Energy Research Programme	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	L
	Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Global Change, Society and Sustainability Research Programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Human Capital Development for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Indigenous Knowledge Systems	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Knowledge Fields Development	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
	SA National Antarctic Programme	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
Y Rated Researchers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	
STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS	Bilaterals and Multilaterals	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Special projects	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Stand Alone programmes	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Conference fund	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Horizon 2020 European Research Council	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Overseas Bilateral Programmes	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	South African Research Chairs Initiative	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Southern African Systems Analysis Centre	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
	Equipment-related Travel and Training Grants	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N
Infrastructure Funding Instrument	Y	L	L	L	L	N	N	N	N	

Key to Table 3

- Y** - Yes (supported)
N - No (not supported)
L - Linked (cannot apply directly but can benefit)

South African HEIs (publicly funded) - All South Africa's publicly funded institutions of higher learning

South African Science Councils - Statutory science councils (e.g. the CSIR, Mintek)

Museums (publicly funded) - Research-intensive museums in South Africa

National Research Facilities - iThemba LABS, NZG, SAAO, SAIAB, SAEON, HartRAO

Publicly funded research institutions - NRF-approved research-intensive institutions

HEIs from other countries - e.g. Oxford University, Harvard University

NRF-approved NGOs - Research-intensive NGOs registered in South Africa

Private sector companies - Local and foreign industry (for-profit organisation)

6. RESTRICTIONS ON HOLDING MULTIPLE NRF GRANTS

The restrictions on holding multiple NRF awards are indicated in Table 4 (refer to Call documents for exceptions):

- A student may not receive more than one bursary or scholarship from the NRF concurrently;
- A student, who is supported by an NRF bursary/scholarship/fellowship, may not apply for another research grant too;
- 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 one grant for an identical or closely related research proposal: the decision on whether two proposals are identical or sufficiently similar to constitute double-dipping will be based on peer review;
- A NRF research Chairholder will not be eligible for an additional NRF Discretionary Core Grant;
- A researcher may receive multiple awards from the NRF according to **Table 4**; and
- An individual may not receive more than one Thuthuka grant.

Table 4 should be read by identifying the grant one holds (or hopes to hold) in Column 1 and then moving horizontally across the table to check which grants can be held simultaneously in the funding instruments listed in the vertical headings.



7. DURATION OF AWARDS

The duration of awards differs among funding instruments. In general, however, awards are made for periods/cycles of three years. In some cases, there may be a limit on the number of funding periods/cycles allowed, especially in the development funding instruments where the emphasis is on the development of research capacity. The duration of a Thuthuka grant, for example, is three cycles of three years each, giving a total support period of nine years. Continued funding within the six-year period, however, is dependent on satisfactory progress, which is assessed annually. Details on the duration of awards are provided in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Duration of awards

Broad Investment Area	Funding Instrument	Award cycles/ years	Maximum number of cycles	Total support period/years
EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUALS		6	Unlimited	
NEXT GENERATION	Sabbatical Grants for the Completion of Doctoral Degrees	1	1	1
	Professional Development Programme Doctoral Support	3	1	3
	Student Support (Free-standing and Grantholder-linked) Honours	1	1	1
	Student Support (Free-standing and Grantholder-linked) Master's	2	1	2
	Student Support (Free-standing and Grantholder-linked) Doctoral	3	1	3
	Thuthuka: PhD Track	3	3	9
EMERGING RESEARCHERS	Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	DAAD Scholarship Programme	1	1	1
	Nanotechnology Flagships Project	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Postdoctoral Fellowships	3	2	6
	Professional Development Programme Postdoctoral Support	3	1	3
	Research Career Advancement Fellowships	5	1	5
	Thuthuka: Post-PhD Track	3	2	6
	Thuthuka: NRF Rating Track	3	2	6
	TWAS Postgraduate Fellowship	1	1	1
ESTABLISHED RESEARCHERS	African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	African Origins Platform	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Blue Skies Research	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Community Engagement Programme	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Education Research in South Africa	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Global Change, Society and Sustainability Research Programme	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Human Capital Development for Multi-Wavelength Astronomy	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	Incentive Funding for Rated Researchers	6	Duration of valid NRF rating	
	Indigenous Knowledge Systems	3	Unlimited	Reapply
	International Research Grants	Varies	Unlimited	Reapply
	Knowledge Fields Development	Once-off grants (period linked to activity)		
	SA National Antarctic Programme	3	Unlimited	Reapply

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS	Bilaterals and Multilaterals	3	1	3
	Mobility and Special projects	1	1	1
	Stand Alone programmes	3	3	3
	Horizon 2020 European Research Council	1	1	1
	Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration	1	1	1
	Overseas Bilateral Programmes	1	1	1
	South African Research Chairs Initiative	1	1	1
	Southern African Systems Analysis Centre	1	1	1
	Equipment-related Travel and Training Grants	1	Unlimited	Reapply
	Research Infrastructure Support Programme	1	1	1

8. GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Grants are managed by RISA's Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate. GMSA's Directors are responsible for a number of funding instruments as described in this booklet.

The management of grants is made up of two distinct activities, namely:

- **Pre-award activities or grant making:** All grants are awarded on a competitive basis through peer review of proposals submitted to the NRF; and
- **Post-award activities or grant paying:** The transfer of funds to the researcher's institution and the monitoring of research progress and expenditure. (Grants are seldom, if ever, paid to individuals. However, some Free-standing Scholarships and Fellowships are paid directly to the awardee).

Note: All applications for funding must be submitted during specific Call periods using the NRF Online Submission System (<https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>), unless otherwise indicated in the Call announcement.

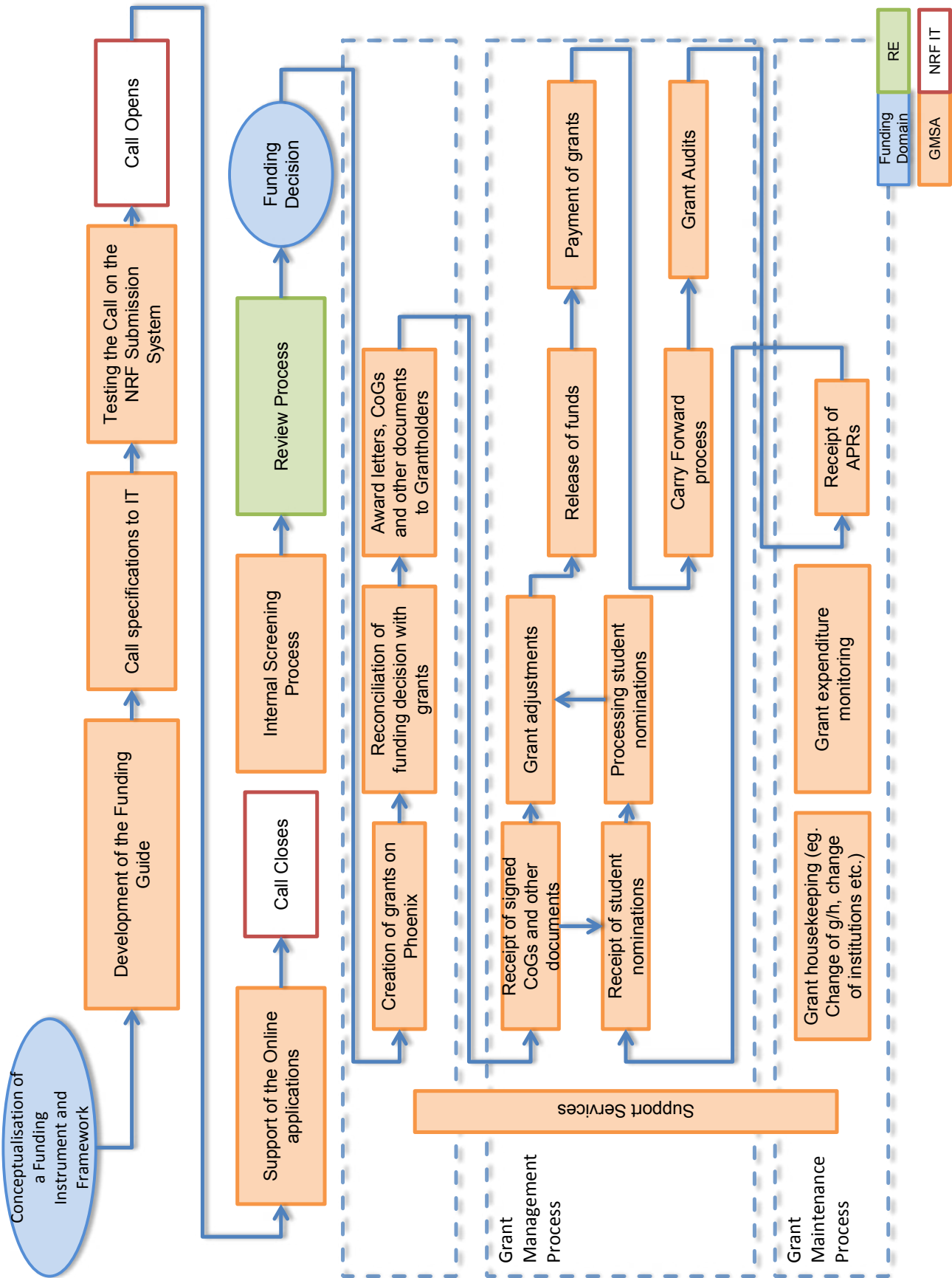
The NRF manages and disburses funds received from various sources, including the NRF Discretionary Core Grant; and various Government departments, e.g.

- Department of Science and Technology (DST);
- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET);
- Department of Trade and Industry (the dti);
- Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT); and
- Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF).

The funds are disbursed according to strict criteria set by the sponsor, and are transferred to the NRF as either Ring-fenced or Contract Grants.

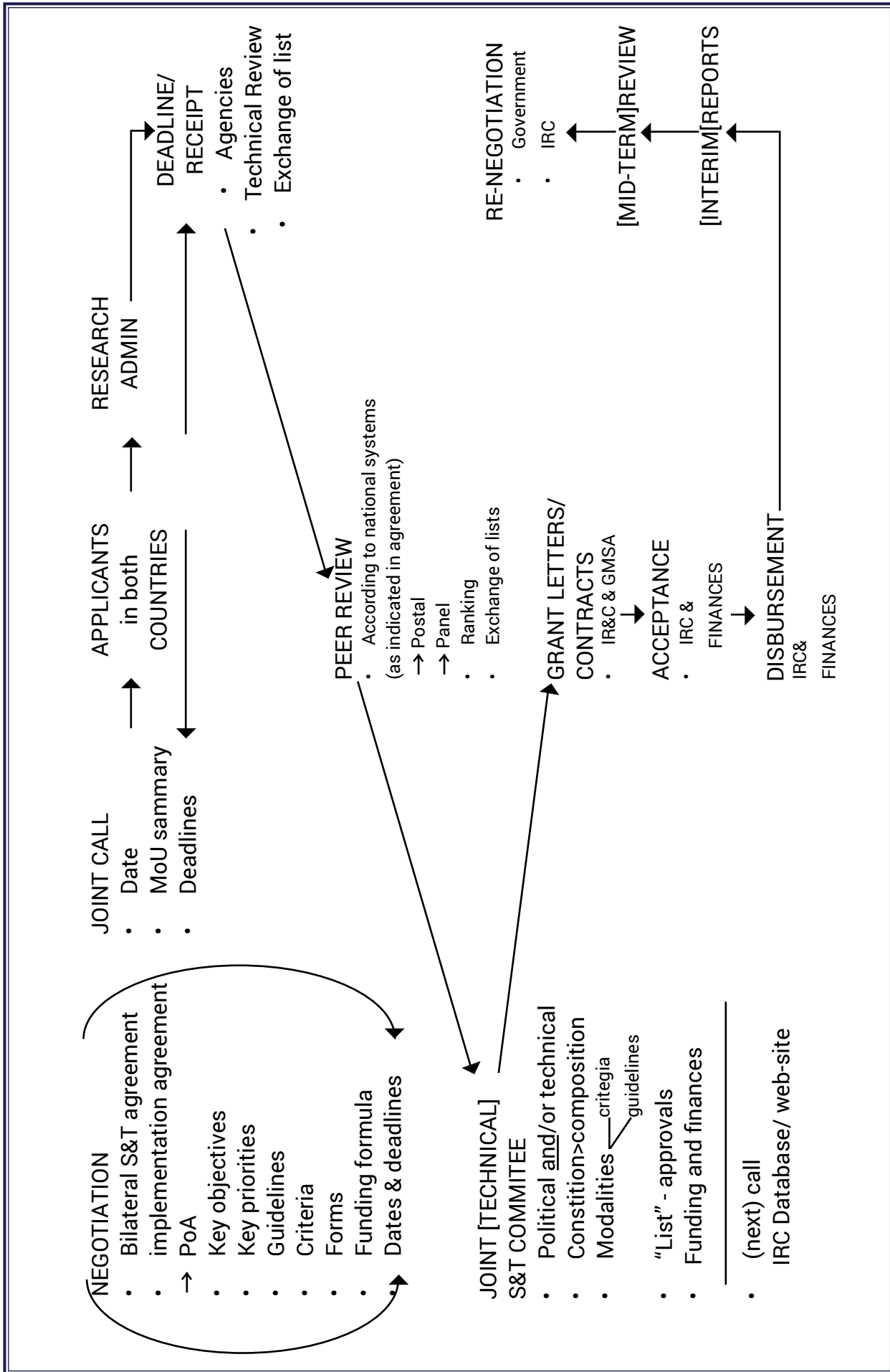
The Grant Management Cycle is described in **Figure 1**. The typical period of a Grant Management Cycle is one calendar year.

Figure 1: Funding Instrument Management Process



It is important to note that the grant management cycle is slightly different for International Research Grants makes provision for joint committees with international partners for funding decision-making purposes. Please see **Figure 2**.

Figure 2: International Research Grant Management Cycle

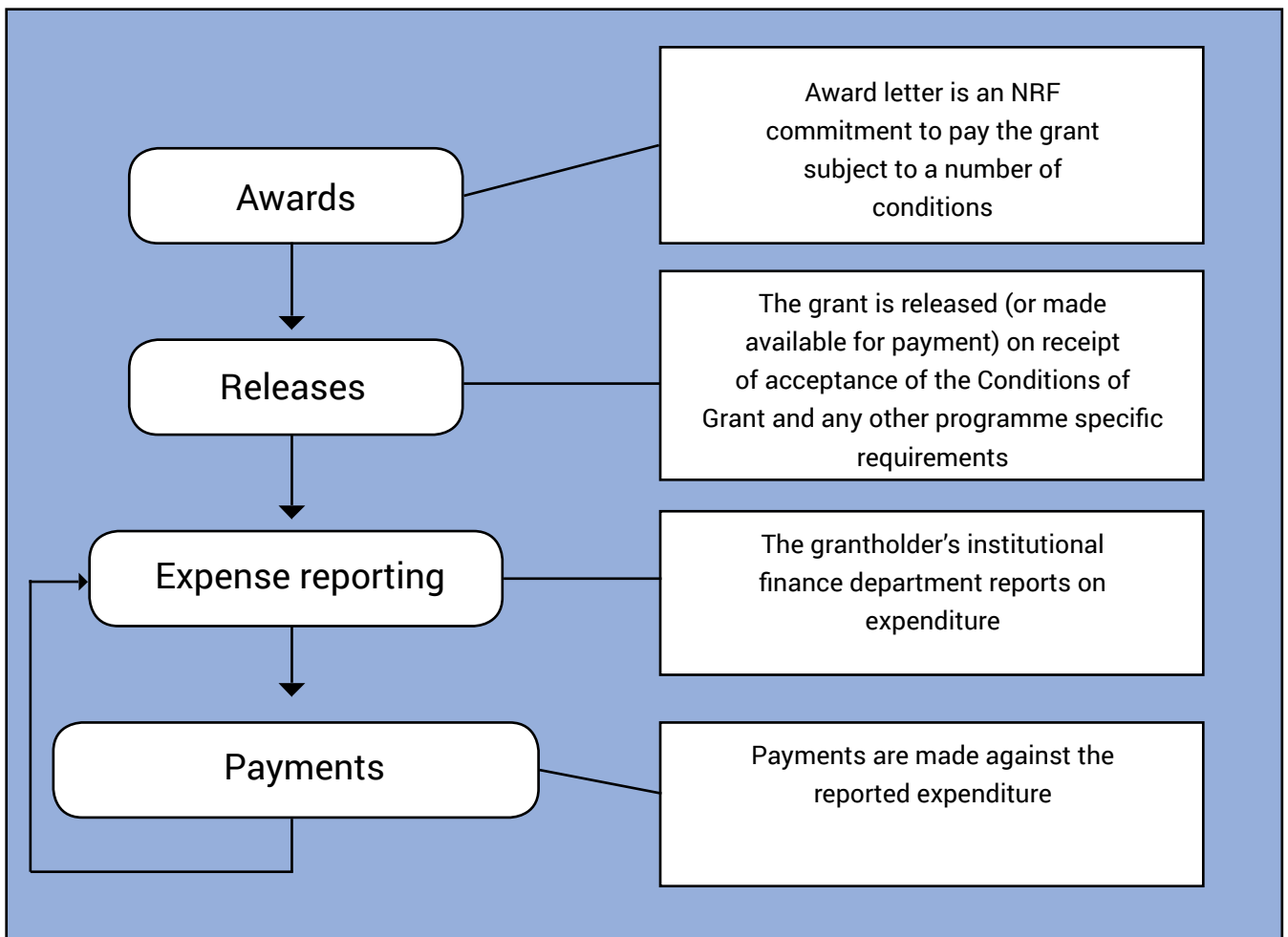


9. GRANTS PAYMENT PROCESS

The NRF pays grants to the grantholder's institution of employment. Batch payments are made twice a month during the first and third week of the month. Each payment is accompanied by a description of the grant for which the payment is earmarked. Institutional finance officials process the expenditure online at: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>. Updated statements are generated after payments have been made.

The grantholder can also access grant statements online on a continuous basis and the institution's research office at: <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za> through the Grantholder Tools facility or Institution Facilities.

Figure 3: Payment Process



10. EVALUATION AND RATING OF INDIVIDUALS

The evaluation and rating of individuals is primarily based on the quality of individuals' research outputs in the recent past (over the last eight years) and is undertaken by national and international peer reviewers, who are requested to evaluate the quality of the research outputs critically, and the applicant's research standing in their field. There are currently five rating categories (A, B, C, P and Y).

The two main reasons for researchers' seeking to be rated are:

- Rated researchers are eligible to receive incentive funding;
- They can apply for a grant at any time during their six-year rating cycle and their rating is often taken into account in the review process; and
- Ratings can be used as a tool for benchmarking purposes (i.e. researchers can compare their standing in the research community against that of their peers nationally and internationally).

10.1 Eligibility for Rating

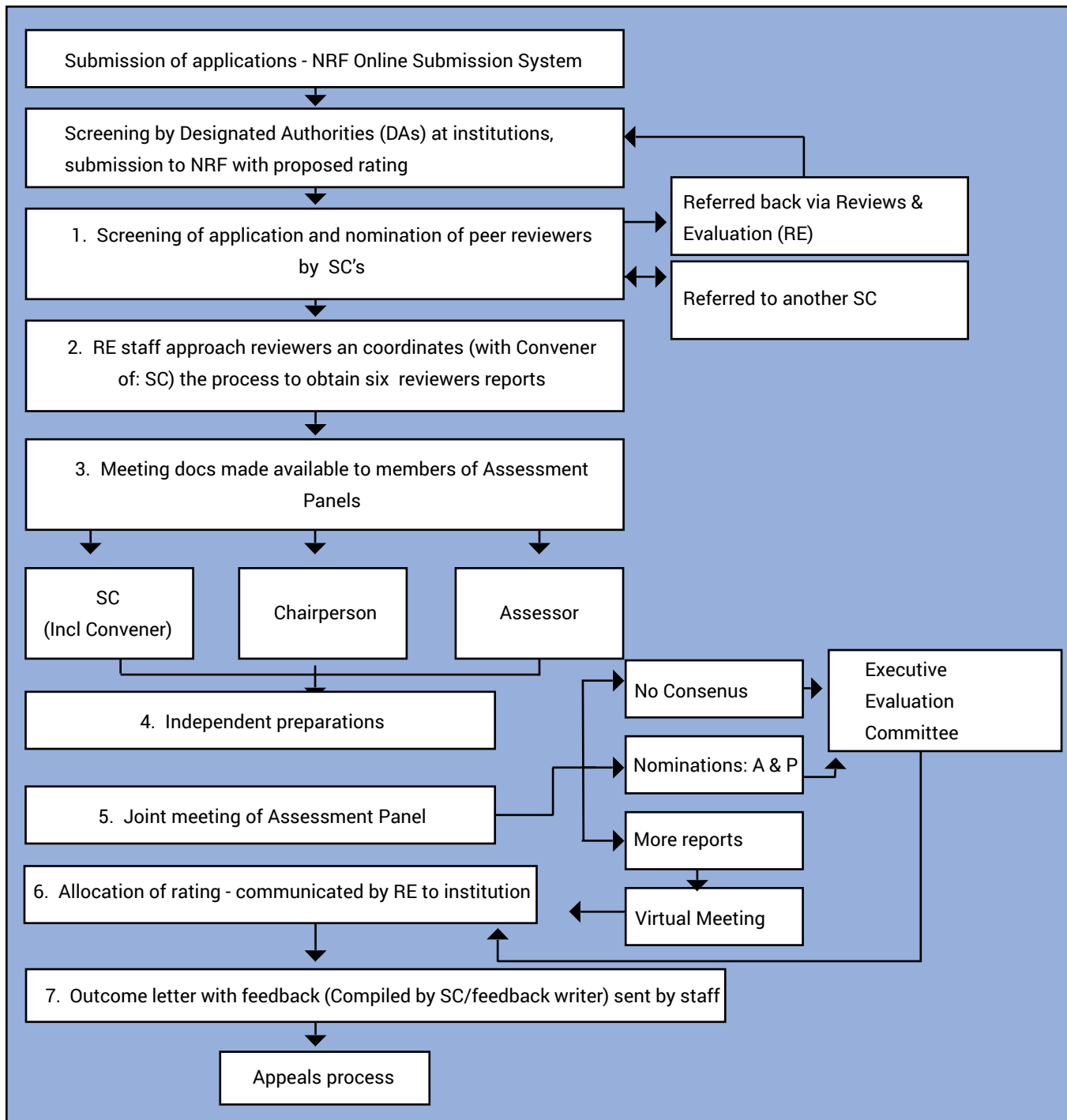
The following persons are eligible to apply for evaluation and rating:

1. Researchers who are employed and remunerated on a full-time, part-time or contract basis at South African HEIs, museums or NRF-recognised research institutions. (For retired academics/researchers, Number 6 in this list applies.)
2. Full-time temporary staff members at South African HEIs and museums, who enjoy the conditions of service that normally also apply to their permanent full-time colleagues.
3. Persons who are in the process of being appointed in full-time positions at South African HEIs and museums (i.e. applications from such persons can be submitted by the HEI). However, a motivation confirming the researcher's employment and proposed starting date should be provided before the rating will become valid.
4. Persons holding joint appointments between a South African institution and a foreign institution who are actively involved in research capacity building locally and who are actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff. Such persons should be appointed 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 motivation should be submitted by the applicant's institution confirming that these conditions have been met.
5. Persons holding joint appointments between two institutions within SA (of which at least one appointment should be a formal association with a NRF-recognised research institution), who are actively involved in research capacity building locally and mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff. Such persons must indicate which institution is their primary institution (i.e. the institution must be submitted with the application, confirming that these conditions have been met.
6. Retired academics/researchers must meet all the following criteria:
 - Reside in SA;
 - Formally affiliated to a South African HEI (e.g. appointed as an emeritus professor, honorary research associate/professor or supernumerary/contract employee);
 - The candidate's application for rating must be formally supported and endorsed by the South African HEI to which he/she is affiliated, or anticipates to be affiliated;
 - Active researchers with a distinguished track record of research and postgraduate student supervision; and
 - Actively mentoring/training postgraduate students/young research staff.

10.2 Rating Procedure

The rating procedure is described on the NRF website (<http://www.nrf.ac.za>) and briefly illustrated in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Evaluation and rating process



11. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this overview has helped to provide some clarity on the NRF processes and procedures, which may appear complex. More detailed information on award opportunities is available on the NRF website at: www.nrf.ac.za. General enquiries may be directed by e-mail to: info@nrf.ac.za and grant related enquiries to: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za.

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