



***RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANTS FOR
Y-RATED RESEARCHERS***

**KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT AND SUPPORT
Framework Document**

February 2021

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RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANTS FOR Y-RATED RESEARCHERS

1 DESCRIPTION OF FUNDING INSTRUMENT

Research Development grants for Y-Rated Researchers are ring-fenced, once-off grants and competitive discipline-based funding instrument aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to drive our transformation consistently and strategically through supporting primarily basic research as the foundation of knowledge production in the disciplines of the Humanities, Social and Natural sciences.

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

- **A valid NRF Y-rating of the principal applicant;**
- **Scientific merit and quality of the research proposal**

Although the funding instrument ostensibly has a broad and non-directed theme and structure, funding will be prioritised to the top scoring applications within each broad-field/discipline that are not supported through other NRF funding instruments, such as African Origins Platform (Palaeosciences), Global Change Grand Challenge, South African National Antarctic Programme, Marine and Coastal Research *etc.* The emphasis will be on basic and as appropriate, applied research in disciplinary fields, and will allow for multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary enquiry along the basic-applied research continuum.

Other than in the case of dedicated or ring-fenced funding that support identified fields, disciplines and funding instruments, the NRF through the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers does not drive nor attempt in any way to “dictate” the direction of research of the applicants, but research into national priorities would be of particular interest in the context of making a contribution to wider system objectives.

2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Object of the NRF is to contribute to National Development by:

- (a) Supporting, promoting and advancing research and human capacity development, through funding and the provision of the necessary research infrastructure, in order to facilitate the creation of knowledge, innovation and development in all fields of science and technology, including humanities, social sciences and indigenous knowledge;
- (b) Developing, supporting and maintaining national research facilities;
- (c) Supporting and promoting public awareness of, and engagement with science; and
- (d) Promoting the development and maintenance of the national science system and support of Government priorities.

NRF recently developed its vision 2030 as well as strategy 2025.

Vision 2030

The overall objectives for 2030 are to shape, influence and impact the national research system; to establish the NRF as a thought leader and source of knowledge within the science sector; to create a clear causal relationship between research and national development; to have a transformative effect on the national research enterprise and the relationship between science and society; and to enable, initiate, facilitate and perform excellent research with direct and indirect impact, whether immediate or long-term, that extends the frontiers of knowledge and addresses national challenges.

Strategy 2025

NRF Strategy 2025 is an implementation framework for the ten-year vision. This strategy is centred on the NRF's desire to contribute to national development through research with impact. The strategic outcomes include:

- i. A transformed (internationally competitive and sustainable) research workforce.
- ii. Enhanced impact of the research enterprise.
- iii. Enhanced impact of science engagement.
- iv. A transformed organisation that lives its culture and values.

2.1 Environmental scan

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers is one of the NRF instruments that develops transformed and highly skilled science and technology community. In driving this programme both the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and the NRF recognise the need to deliberately provide dedicated support to emerging and promising researchers to hasten their process of establishing themselves as established researchers.

While it is recognised that the innovation value chain requires basic, strategic and applied research, the emphasis in this funding instrument will primarily be on the support of basic research (Frascati Manual, 2002). In order to participate in the international system of innovation, a nation needs to understand the knowledge produced by others. Support for basic disciplinary research is thus seen as an investment in a society's learning capabilities.

At the same time, this funding instrument acknowledges that basic and applied research are a continuum and inter-dependent (ICSU, 2004) and that increasingly, the notion of "frontier research" is gaining purchase internationally, as it transcends the distinction of basic and applied research and refers to leading edge research which is risky and often across different disciplines.

While it is recognised that the innovation value chain requires basic, strategic and applied research, the emphasis in this funding instrument will primarily be on the support of both basic research and applied research (Frascati Manual, 2002). In order to participate in an international system of innovation, a nation needs to produce knowledge and understand the knowledge produced by others. Support for basic disciplinary research is thus seen as an investment in a society's learning capabilities (Salter and Martin, 2001).

Social Sciences, Law and Humanities applications are encouraged, just like those in the natural sciences, engineering and health science that have traditionally been supported. The NRF continues to support self-initiated bottom-up research ideas and research that address national strategic initiatives as reflected in national strategies like the National Development Plan, and those that are embedded in our geographic advantage areas. In respect to the social sciences and humanities however, the NRF would like to highlight the fact that it is supportive and committed to working closely with the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) on the advancement of social sciences and the humanities scholarship in South Africa.

The NRF should not be seen to be driving a particular research agenda, nor attempting in any way to be “dictating” to the direction of research, but research into these specific areas would be of particular interest in the context of making a contribution to wider system objectives.

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the funding instrument are:

- To contribute to the development of a sound fundamental basis to scientific and scholarly endeavour in South Africa, in the Humanities, Natural and Social Science disciplines;
- To contribute to knowledge production across the research spectrum;
- To achieve world-class research and to develop the associated human capacity;
- Provide dedicated support to emerging and promising researchers to strengthen their research portfolio and contribute towards their achievement of established researcher status;
- To advance or develop paradigms, theories and methodological innovation across the research spectrum.

2.3 NRF Perspective

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers is a discipline-based, demand-driven funding instrument that focuses on basic disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research, while allowing (where appropriate) for the “continuum of knowledge” approach alluded to above and supports emerging researchers. This is in line with the NRF’s view that support for basic disciplinary research is an investment in South Africa’s learning capabilities. The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers directly, and in part, addresses the following strategic outcomes of the *NRF Strategy 2025*:

- A transformed (internationally competitive and sustainable) research workforce.
- Enhanced impact of the research enterprise.
- Enhanced impact of science engagement.

2.4 Institutional structure

The strategic direction and outcomes of the funding instrument are managed by the Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS) Directorate. The Reviews and Evaluation (RE) Directorate is responsible for the review processes up to the recommendations of grant awards. The Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Directorate’s

responsibilities include posting of the research call for applications, disbursement of grant funds, and ensuring adherence to the conditions of the grant.

2.5 Financing support

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers is made possible through contract funding from the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). Each application may request no more than R300 000 for a period of 3 years. Financial requests need to be in line with requirements and accurately reflect the financial needs of the proposed work. Excessive budget requests are not well received by the review panels.

2.6 Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders involved in the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers are persons with a valid NRF Y-rating based at recognised research institutions that have been approved by the Department of Science and Innovation. These include mainly, Public Universities, Museums, National Research Facilities and Science Councils.

2.7 Information sources

Frascati Manual: Proposed standard practice for surveys on Research and Experimental Development, 2002. OECD, Paris

Salter, A.J. and Martin, B.R. The Economic Benefits of Publicly Funded Basic Research A Critical Review. Research Policy, 30, 509-532, 2001.

International Council for Science (ICSU). The value of basic scientific research, 2004
Accessed 10/12/2009.

National Research Foundation, South Africa Strategic Plan 2025. 2020.

National Research Foundation Vision 2030. Pretoria. National Research Foundation, South Africa. 2020.

3 MODUS OPERANDI

3.1 Call for proposals

All applications **must** be submitted electronically via the NRF Online Submission System at <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>

All applications **must** be endorsed by the research office of the principal applicant before submission to the NRF. It is the responsibility of each applicant to familiarise him / herself with the **internal closing dates** set by his / her institution in order to meet the NRF closing date indicated in the "General Application Guide 2022.

Incomplete OR late submissions will not be accepted.

3.2 Eligibility

- Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers grantholders may only hold **ONE** Y-Rated research grant. Previous Y-rated grantholders are **not eligible** to apply again.
- Each new Principal Investigator **may only submit ONE** application to this call.
- Y-rated Principal Investigators **must choose** between submitting an application in this funding instrument or in the Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers (CPRR). Applicants will **forfeit** their application in **this** funding instrument if they apply to CPRR.
- Full-time employees at an NRF recognized research institution in South Africa, **who are eligible to apply and who hold a valid NRF Y-rating at the time of application**, are invited to apply.
- NRF rated part-time employees on contract at an NRF recognized research institution (as defined above) in South Africa who hold a valid Y-Rating may apply, on condition their appointment at the South African institution is for (at least) the duration of the project applied for in the submission. The length of the contract should be stated in the application form. The primary employment of the individual concerned must be at that institution. A contract researcher appointed at a research institution on behalf of a third party to fulfill a very specific function for the latter does not qualify for support.
- Successful Y-rated applicants will be eligible for funding **for the duration of their awarded grant**, to a maximum of 3 years. The grant allocation will be allowed to run the duration of the award, even if the principal investigator loses his / her rating status during this period.

3.3 Ethical Clearance

It is the responsibility of the grant holder, in conjunction with the institution, to ensure that all research activities carried out in or outside South Africa comply with the laws and regulations of South Africa and/or the foreign country in which the research activities are conducted. These include all human and animal subjects, copyright and intellectual property protection, and other regulations or laws, as appropriate. A research ethics committee must review and approve the ethical and academic rigor of all research prior to the commencement of the research and acceptance of the grant.

The awarded amount will not be released for payment if a copy of the required ethical clearance certificate, as indicated in the application, is not attached to the Conditions of Grant.

Please also refer to the “Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices” on the NRF website at <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/statement-ethical-research-and-scholarly-publishing-practices>.

3.4 Application assessment

The assessment of applications will be guided by a Panel Assessment Scorecard (**see Annexure 1**), and scored according to the Proposal Grading (**see Annexure 2**). Application assessment will occur by way of a two-tiered process:

- **Remote peer-review**

The remote peer reviewers will be specialists in the ambit of the respective proposals. Requests for written reviews will be solicited electronically, or through appropriate media / means from peers located at remote locations from the NRF. Applicants should list remote reviewers that are peers in their field and have a good research track record. Additionally, applicants are encouraged to forward remote reviewers from across the globe for fairness and critical assessment of the application and can suggest more than 6 reviewers. It is also in the applicant's best interest to ensure that selected reviewers have no possible conflict of interest in submitting a review; as such review reports are dismissed without consideration. On average, a 30% response rate is achieved by the NRF in requesting postal peer reviews.

- **Panel-peer review**

The adjudication panel will be broadly constituted to include senior academics, selected based both on their respective knowledge fields and their research standing. The panel meeting will be held at central location or by way of tele- or video-conferencing. Panel members will deliberate on submitted written reviews and will be expected to offer their own expert opinions.

NB: Applicants **must ensure that their Curriculum Vitae are updated on the NRF Submission system at**

<https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>.

These Curriculum Vitae are used in the assessment processes, and incomplete or outdated inputs will disadvantage the application.

3.5 Rules of participation

a) Principal Investigator

Only Y-rated researchers based at NRF recognized research institutions in South Africa (as defined above) are eligible to apply as principal investigators (PI) in this funding instrument.

The principal investigator (*i.e.* applicant) must be an active researcher who takes intellectual responsibility for the project, its conception, any strategic decisions required in its pursuit, and the communication of results. The PI must have the capacity to make a serious commitment to the project and cannot assume the role of a supplier of resources for work that will largely be placed in the hands of others. The PI will take responsibility for the management and administration of resources allocated to the grant award, and for the meeting of reporting requirements.

The research team may also include:

b) Co-investigators

A co-investigator is an active researcher who provides significant commitment, intellectual input and relevant expertise into the design and implementation of the research application. The Co-investigator will be involved in all or at least some well-defined research activities within the scope of the application. Only South Africa-based co-investigators will be eligible for funding in successful grant applications.

It is important to note that postdoctoral fellows, students, technical and support staff DO NOT Qualify as co-investigators

c) Research Associates / Collaborators

These individuals or groups make a relatively small, but meaningful contribution to the research endeavours outlined in the application, but do not participate in the research design. They are not considered a part of the core research team, and are not eligible to receive NRF funds from the grant if the team's application is successful.

3.6 Timelines

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers grants will be awarded for a period of no more than three years (**2022 – 2024**). Funding via this funding instrument is once off.

3.7 Data management and use

A data management Plan (DMP) is a formal document that describes the data you expect to acquire or generate during the course of a research project, how you will manage, describe, analyze, and store those data, and what mechanisms (including digital data storage) you will use at the end of your project to share and preserve your data.

Research data sharing that underlies the findings reported in a journal article/conference paper/thesis as set out in the NRF Open Access Statement.

The findings reported in a journal article or conference paper should be deposited in accordance with the NRF Open Access Statement. It is acknowledged that some data generated are more sensitive than others. Before initiating the research, it is the grantholder's responsibility to consider the following: confidentiality, ethics, security and copyright. Possible data sharing challenges should be considered in the DMP with solutions to optimise data sharing.

Researchers should note that publicly funded research data is in the public domain, with free and open access, by default. Collaborators and co-investigators in the research project should be informed by the applicant that due to public funding and funder mandate, one is expected to share research data as openly as possible. The Data Management Plan should indicate which data will be shared. If (some) research data is to be restricted, an appropriate statement in the DMP and subsequent publication should explain why access to data is restricted.

The National Research Foundation has adopted and is given permission to use the [DCC Checklist for Data Management Plan](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP_Checklist_2013.pdf), and this can be used as a guide for developing the DMP. (http://www.dcc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/resource/DMP/DMP_Checklist_2013.pdf)

3.8 Science Engagement

The NRF supports science engagement through its coordination and implementation of the Department of Science and Technology's Science Engagement Strategy. The strategy embraces a broad understanding of science, encompassing systematic knowledge spanning natural and physical sciences, engineering sciences, medical sciences, agricultural sciences, mathematics, social sciences and humanities, technology, all aspects of the innovation chain and indigenous knowledge. Within this context, science engagement refers to activities, events, or interactions characterised by mutual learning and dialogue among people of varied backgrounds, scientific expertise and life experiences, who articulate and discuss their perspectives, ideas, knowledge and values. Science engagement is an overarching term for all aspects of public engagement with science, science awareness, science education, science communication and science outreach, which aim to develop and benefit individuals and society. Researchers funded through the NRF programmes are required to contribute to science engagement and report the related outputs in their project's Progress Report.

3.9 Management of funding instrument

The **KAS Directorate** of the NRF – Research and Innovation Support and Advancement (RISA) manages the Y-Rated funding instrument, and is responsible for:

- Strategic oversight and management of the funding instrument;
- Conceptualizing and developing the funding instrument;
- Coordinating and facilitating activities of the funding instrument;
- Compiling funding instrument research and evaluation reports;
- Stakeholder engagement; and
- Ensuring that the funding instruments delivers on its intended goal(s).

The **RE Directorate** of the NRF – RISA is responsible for managing the adjudication process including:

- sourcing of reviewers both for remote reviews and panels;
- managing the peer review process;
- organizing and managing the review panels as and where appropriate;
- providing feedback as appropriate; and

The **GMSA Directorate** of the NRF – RISA is responsible for

- Managing the call process, that is,
 - Posting the call;
 - Receiving and assessing applications eligibility;
- Coordinating and facilitating the granting processes
- Managing the granting including the administration of awards;
- Administering grant payments; and
- Ensuring adherence to conditions of grants

3.10 Lines of authority

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers Director in the KAS Directorate manages the funding instrument. The Director responsible for this instrument reports to the Executive Director of the KAS Directorate. Directors from RE and GMSA manage the review and granting processes. The Directors in both RE and GMSA report to their respective Executive Directors.

4 FINANCIALS

4.1 Funding model

The grants of this funding instrument are to be primarily used for **research purposes** and for the development of associated human resources under the auspices of the NRF standard grant and finance policies. The money is released upon acceptance of the conditions of grant, both by the applicant and his/her employing institution. These grants will fall under the NRF audit requirements of beneficiary institutions.

4.2 Funding ranges

The allocation of funds is capped at R300 000 per application. Successful applications will receive funding that accommodates research-related operating costs, including:

- Materials and Supplies
- Travel and subsistence
- Research / Technical / *Ad hoc* Assistants
- Research Equipment

The application assessment process will consider proposed budget items in terms of cost, risk and reward ratios. Decisions relating to budget items will also be governed by the overall funding instrument funds available for the period. Awards will be made in line with the NRF funding rules and guidelines as outlined in **Section 4.3**.

4.3 Funding support

Science councils, public universities, museums and other NRF recognized institutions are the primary beneficiaries of this funding instrument.

Research-related operating costs

These costs include materials and supplies, travel (including conferences) and subsistence, equipment and research/technical/*ad hoc* assistance and sabbaticals to other research organisations and institutions of higher learning may be included within the context of the project applications. These costs should be justified and commensurate with the planned outputs, as they will be assessed on this basis. The amount awarded within this framework can be used at the discretion of the applicant.

General guidelines

Materials and Supplies

Generally, the NRF does not provide financial support for:

- Basic office equipment including computers and consumables unless the computer is required for the research itself.
- Basic office stationery, photocopying costs, printing costs unless these items form part of the research tools.
- Journal publication costs, journal subscription costs and book costs.
- Telephone, fax and internet costs.

Travel and subsistence

- International conference attendance: Generally the NRF restricts this amount to R25,000 per person to a maximum of R50,000 per application per year for a team application i.e. for principal investigators and co-investigators (local only) and local postgraduate students.
- International visits: These will be considered on a case by case basis. Such visits must be integral to the research plan and strong motivations should accompany these requests. Realistic funding allocations will be based on the requested activities. Only outgoing visits will be considered depending on the availability of funding.
- Local conference attendance: Generally the NRF restricts expenditure against this item to R5,000 per person (all costs). Support for local conference attendance could be requested for all listed co-investigators and postgraduate students. The applicant should clearly motivate for the benefit to attend more than one local conference per annum, and for the number of people attending each local conference.
- Local travel: The NRF does not stipulate any rate for mileage as this will depend on the rate which varies per institution/organisation. Applicants are requested to provide details of this rate as well as the estimated distance to be travelled within the given year.
- Local accommodation costs should not exceed a 3* establishment
- Science Engagement activities: A budget of up to R30,000 may be allocated for science communication/awareness/education activities, if there are no funds for these from other sources. Specific motivation for these additional funds must be made in the proposal.

Research / Technical / Ad hoc Assistants

- This instrument **does not provide funding for salaries**.
- Requests for research/technical/ad hoc assistance should be treated with caution. Generally the NRF would encourage applicants to engage students to undertake the research rather than employing research consultants. The NRF will not pay for students to undertake research. This guideline however does not apply when specific and/or highly specialised research/technical expertise is required. This should be **CLEARLY** motivated for in the application.

Administrative assistance does not qualify as technical assistance.

Research Equipment

Funding for small equipment will be limited to R50 000 which can be used over the duration of the project.

d) Funding to cater for disabilities

Additional funding support to cater for disability will be allocated to people with disabilities as specified in the Code of Good Practice on Employment of People with Disabilities as in the Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998.

4.4 Financial control and reporting

Upon receipt of the signed Conditions of Grant, the NRF will release the awarded amount for the year. Grantholders will then be required to comply with the standard NRF financial management procedures, including the submission of a Progress Report. These are to be submitted by 15 February of the following year, and are a prerequisite for the release of the subsequent year's funding.

Failure to submit a Progress Report will result in the cancellation of the grant award.

5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE FUNDING INSTRUMENT

The NRF is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers.

5.1 Reporting

The KAS Director is responsible for reporting quarterly on the contribution of the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers funding instrument to the KAS Directorate's Key Performance Indicators. In addition, the Director is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the progress of the funding instrument.

5.2. Timeframes for funding instrument review

The funding instrument will be evaluated by an appropriate external reviewer as appointed by the RE Directorate. In consultation with this directorate, KAS will agree to and set timeframes for the review in line with existing guidelines.

5.3 Broad terms of reference for the funding instrument review

The broad terms of reference for the programme review of the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers funding instrument will be determined by the KAS Directorate prior to the evaluation taking place, and in accordance with tenets set in the RE Directorate's Guidelines.

5.4 Utilisation of funding instrument review findings and recommendations

The results of the evaluation will be used in line with the purpose set in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation, as well as for instrument improvement and development.

Please direct all enquiries to:

NRF Online application and grants management related queries	
GMSA	
Ms Jane Mabena E-mail: jane.mabena@nrf.ac.za Tel: 012 481 4067	
KAS	
Ms Zodwa Masinga E-mail: Zodwa.masinga@nrf.ac.za Tel: 012 481 4310	

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
DMP	Data Management Plan
GMSA	Grants Management and Systems Administration
ISC	International Science Council
KAS	Knowledge Advancement and Support
NIHSS	National Institute for the Humanities and Social Science
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PI	Principal Investigator
RE	Reviews and Evaluation
RISA	Research and Innovation Support and Advancement

ANNEXURE 1: Panel Assessment Scorecard – Y-Rated Researchers

Criteria	Sub-Criteria	Details	Score / 4	Weight
Proposals	Scientific merit and feasibility	Reflect on the proposed rationale, approach and methodology. Reflect on the scientific, ethical ¹ logistics and technical feasibility as proposed		50%
	Knowledge production and contribution	Will the proposed contribute to the development and understanding of knowledge in the field?		5%
Track record of the applicant	Past research	Reflect on past contributions to knowledge production (e.g. journal articles, book chapters, designs, performances, etc.)		5%
Equity	Of applicant	Race / Gender		20%
Collaboration	International, national and institutional collaborations	Are the appropriate collaborations proposed in the application? Are the roles of the proposed collaborators clearly indicated?		5%
Impact	Wider impact	Has the possibility for economic, societal or environmental impact been appropriately embedded in the proposal? Is it clear how such impact will be measured?		5%
Data management and use	Data management plan	A data management plan (DMP) is a formal document that describes the data you expect to acquire or generate during the course of a research project, how you will manage, describe, analyze, and store those data, and what mechanisms (including digital data storage) you will use at the end of your project to share and preserve your data?		10%
			Totals	100%

ANNEXURE 2: Proposal Grading

Score	Meaning of score	Notes
4	Excellent	Application demonstrates evidence of outstanding performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
3	Above average	Application demonstrates evidence of above average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
2	Average	Application demonstrates evidence of average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by the panel and relative to the knowledge field under consideration
1	Below average	Application demonstrates evidence of below average performance across all the stated criteria, as determined by panel and relative to knowledge field under consideration
0	Poor	There are major shortcomings or flaws as relates to the scientific / scholarly merit and feasibility of the proposed work, as determined by the panel.

Context:

Proposal grading is done with sensitivity to the context within which each application is submitted. The score of each criterion for each application will be contextualised to accommodate variability in such things as knowledge fields, institutional capacity, etc. Should a criterion not be applicable to a specific application (e.g. plans for digital data storage; collaborations; etc.), the weighting of that specific criteria will be made to equal zero, and the overall score normalised.