



RISA

Research and Innovation  
Support and Advancement

Funding Instrument: Infrastructure Bridging Funding

Functional Domain: Human and Infrastructure Capacity  
Development  
Grants Management and Systems  
Administration

Document: Framework and Funding Guide

Date: December 2020

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Strategic Context and Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Objectives .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Scope .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Proposal Requirements.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5. Funding .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6. Financial Control.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7. Application Process .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>8. Evaluation Process.....</b>	<b>7</b>

# 1. Strategic Context and Background

The National Research Foundation (NRF), through a range of funding instruments, supports the acquisition, upgrade and development of research infrastructure at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Science Councils (SCs), Museums, and other NRF recognised research institutions as declared by the Department of Science and Innovation. However, several challenges have been encountered during the implementation phase of each of these programmes. Major challenges include:

- The lack of financial resources available to the research institution to support the infrastructural requirements to house the newly procured research equipment;
- The acquisition of additional research equipment to support the current research infrastructure;
- Unscheduled power outages, access by multi-users and unforeseen / unplanned events that may arise during installation or usage of equipment, undoubtedly result in the malfunctioning and breakage of some of the components of the equipment, which is both costly and deprives the research community of access time;
- The equipment is custom made to the grantholder's research requirements and hence has a long lead-time before equipment is fully installed and commissioned; and
- The financial burden placed on the research institute to contribute to a third of the funding requirements towards the purchase of state-of-the-art research equipment.

In light of the aforementioned challenges, the NRF has implemented a Bridging Funding Initiative in the form of the Infrastructure Bridging Funding (IBF). The IBF makes available non-interest bearing bridging funding to a maximum value of **R5 million per annum per institution, depending on the size of the NRF grants**, to support the physical infrastructural requirements needed to support either the acquisition or upgrade to state-of-the-art research equipment or platform research projects in strategic areas.

The rationale behind the IBF Initiative is to advance NRF funds to support the university community in terms of infrastructure required to extend the boundaries of science, engineering and technology in South Africa. This financial risk must therefore be guaranteed by the institution in terms of the full repayment of the bridging funding within the stipulated 12-month time frame.

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of the IBF Initiative are to:

- Support South African public universities and all other recognised research institutions that are listed as NRF approved beneficiaries above, with the establishment of suitable infrastructure needed for large pieces of research equipment funded through other NRF mechanisms;
- Prevent the delay in the deployment of research equipment due to infrastructural constraints that arise from a shortage of cash or inadequate cash flow; and
- Support the acquisition of research equipment to enhance the research infrastructure capacity at the institutions.

## 3. Scope

Proposals for the IBF must be submitted to the NRF by the Research Office of the South African recognised research institution. As these awards effectively place a financial risk on the institution, the conditions of funding will need to be completed and approved by the following parties representing the institution:

- Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or equivalent); and
- Chief Financial Officer (or equivalent).

The proposals for funding may include requests in support of:

- The upgrade and refurbishment of existing research facilities and/or laboratories to support the housing of equipment in line with the proposed institutional research development infrastructure (RDI);
- The acquisition of additional research equipment to support the current research infrastructure; and
- The acquisition of advanced computer workstations necessary for the promotion of world-class research.

Laptops for routine office work, travel grants for user-training workshops and other human capacity-related initiatives **may not** be included.

The funds made available through this non-interest bearing bridging funding **must be expensed**, according to the institution's proposed plan, within the year that the funds are awarded. The non-interest bearing bridging funding, however, is repayable, in full, to the NRF

by **25 March** of the year immediately after bridging funding was made available to the research institution.

If the institution is unable to pay back the full value of the bridging funding awarded within the stipulated timeframe, then

- The institution will be disqualified from further participation in this Funding Instrument; and
- The total outstanding amount will be recovered either from future grants awarded to the institution or the grant deposit made to the institution.

## 4. Proposal Requirements

For the proposal to be considered, it must contain the following information:

- Willingness to participate in a full NRF audit;
- Description and justification for the proposed research infrastructure;
- Impact of the research infrastructure on the following:
  - Research infrastructure that supports the acquisition and/or upgrade to state-of-the-art research equipment procured from the NRF suite of infrastructure grants;
  - Research infrastructure for other equipment, placed at different departments at the research institute;
  - Research initiatives across research fields at the research institute;
  - Research infrastructure that will assist the institution in building research capacity; and
  - Research infrastructure that will be utilised to train students at postgraduate level and in particular disabled, black and female students.
- A work plan that describes:
  - Details of the project leader;
  - A description of the proposed work (deliverables);
  - Timeframes for the completion of work;
  - Detailed budget;
  - Maintenance and operation of the research infrastructure; and
  - Identified and committed sources for loan repayment.

All proposals must be submitted by the specified date and will be evaluated by an NRF convened panel, prior to decisions for bridging funding being communicated to the successful institutions. Late applications will not be considered unless otherwise decided by the NRF.

## 5. Funding

A budget will be made available in 2020/21 to support the development of infrastructure associated with the purchase and installation of equipment through this funding instrument. A maximum of one application per institution is applicable. Should the demand for IBF exceeds the available budget, preference will be given to institutions that did not receive bridging funding in the previous year. Repayment of the non-interest bearing bridging funding is due no later than **25 March** of the following calendar year to the NRF.

## 6. Financial Control

The IBF will only be made available to NRF recognised research institutions. The Conditions of Funding (CoF) will apply strictly, including the stipulated date of the full payment of the funds to the NRF. Failure to adhere to the CoF will disqualify the institution from participating in the funding initiative and the total outstanding amount will be recovered either from future grants awarded to the institution or the grant deposit made to the institution. The NRF reserves the right to make at least one site visit to inspect progress of the work in relation to the approved proposal.

## 7. Application Process

The Call for IBF Initiative applications will be open **from 08 to 28 February 2021**.

The application process will be accessible online at <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za> from **Monday, 08 February 2021**. Applicants are advised to complete their proposals as soon as possible to prevent an IT system overload nearer the closing date.

The final version of the application will be routed to the Chief Financial Officer (or equivalent) and Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or equivalent) for internal institutional authorisation and approval. ***Late applications will only be considered in exceptional cases and not be considered without NRF prior approval.***

The NRF will not process applications that are incomplete, contain insufficient or incorrect detail, or fail to follow instructions; therefore such applications will be rejected. In addition to the electronic application and required attachments, the NRF may request additional information or documentation to support an application. ***Failure to supply such information or documentation upon request may result in the rejection of the application.***

The NRF assumes that the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or equivalent) and the Chief Financial Officer (or equivalent) through the respective Designated Authorities are satisfied with the contents of all proposals validated and submitted, and that the institution approves and supports the application for Bridging Funding.

## **8. Evaluation Process**

The evaluation of applications will follow a two-step process:

- Internal screening by the NRF; and
- An internal technical review process.

- **Internal Screening Process**

All applications that have been validated by the institutions and submitted to the NRF will be screened by the Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) directorate of the NRF for compliance with the requirements of the Call for Proposals, the stipulations set out in this Framework and Funding Guide, and the system requirements indicated in the online application screens. Applications that fail to comply with the requirements and stipulations of this funding initiative will not proceed to the internal technical review process.

- **Internal Technical Review Process**

All applications that pass the screening process will be subjected to an NRF-convened technical review process. Proposals will be reviewed against set evaluation criteria, as described in the IBF score card that follows.

The following score card will be used to evaluate all applications for the IBF.

Criterion	Details	Weight	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Merit of the Proposal	The relevance and justification of the proposal.	50%	1	2	3	4
Feasibility of the Work plan	Feasibility of the work plan.	20%	1	2	3	4
Support by the institution	Endorsements by the Chief Financial Officer and Deputy Vice Chancellor Research.	10%	1	2	3	4
Financials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feasibility of proposed budget and ability of the institution to return the funds.</li> <li>Willingness to participate in a full NRF audit.</li> </ul>	20%	1	2	3	4

Descriptor	General Guiding Notes
<b>Poor (1)</b>	The proposal provided insufficient information regarding the requirements of the funding instrument, and/or has numerous inconsistencies for a fair evaluation to be conducted.
<b>Satisfactory/ Adequate/ Fair (2)</b>	The proposal meets all minimum requirements of the funding instrument.
<b>Good (3)</b>	This is a strong proposal that fully addresses all requirements of the funding instrument.
<b>Very Good (4)</b>	This is an exceptionally strong proposal that is well thought through and strongly motivated, as well as exceeds all the requirements of the funding instrument.



## **NRF Contacts for Enquiries:**

### **Ms Mpai Motsei**

Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA)

Telephone: (012) 481-4078

e-mail: [mpai.motsei@nrf.ac.za](mailto:mpai.motsei@nrf.ac.za)

### **Ms Queen Mohohoma**

Professional Officer: Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development (HICD)

Telephone: (012) 481-4392

e-mail: [queen.mohohoma@nrf.ac.za](mailto:queen.mohohoma@nrf.ac.za)