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Research, Innovation and Impact
Support and Advancement

National Research Foundation (NRF) - FirstRand Foundation (FRF): Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP)

Framework document

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

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1 Introduction

The National Research Foundation (NRF) and the FirstRand Foundation (FRF) have partnered to pursue the goal of increasing the proportion of suitably qualified Black African academic staff and academic staff with disabilities, at South African public universities, by establishing the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP).

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

The FRF is a leader in corporate social investment in the financial services sector and the organisation's investment in this initiative, is guided by one of its strategic intents to contribute to a strengthened economy and a better South Africa through Education and Skills development. The FRF and NRF entered into an agreement to support Black academics, particularly Black African males and females and, persons with disabilities, employed at public universities in South Africa to attain PhD level qualifications and Post-PhD research training.

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

In addition to the burden of postgraduate supervision among South African universities, transformation continues to remain a critical imperative in South Africa, particularly considering the ethnic and gender composition of key sectors of society such as universities. Of the 3 392 NRF rated researchers in South Africa in 2015, only 26% were Black, and 31% were female. The cohort of Black NRF-rated researchers comprised of 16% African, 3% Coloured, and 7% Indian academics and researchers. Black South African citizens made up only 6% of the NRF-rated researchers and only six (6) of these researchers achieved an NRF A rating. As of November 2023, there has been an increase in the proportion of Black NRF-rated researchers and they comprise of 23.7% African, 5.05% Coloured, 7.6% Indian academics and researchers. However, even with the increase in the proportion of Black NRF rated researchers, the proportion of Black rated research does not correspond to the demographics of the country. It is for this

reason, that Black African participation in knowledge production and transforming the profile of active Black researchers within the South African National System of Innovation, is a fundamental imperative.

It is argued that a lack of resources and teaching demands are the major challenges that limit the completion of PhD degrees by academic staff and also limits them in undertaking Post-PhD research on the path to becoming established researchers. This programme will therefore enable successful applicants to spend up to three (3) years undertaking full-time research to complete their PhD degree or, two (2) years of full-time Post-PhD research training. During this period, successful applicants are expected to be released from their teaching and administrative responsibilities to focus on attaining a PhD degree and/or Post-PhD research training. However, participation in postgraduate training and other research-related activities may continue subject to internal institutional agreements.

2 Aim

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

3 Objectives

In light of the above, the objectives of the Black Academics Advancement Programme are to:

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

4 Allocation Principles

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

Equity and redress: In keeping with the equity and transformation objectives of the country, BAAP will support only **South African citizens** employed at South African public universities as full-time academics. The equity target for this programme is to support South African

citizens being 90% African and 10% comprising of Indian, Coloured and persons with disabilities. Fifty-five (55%) percent of all grants will be prioritised for female applicants.

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

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

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

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

5 Application Process

5.1 Call for Proposals

The NRF issues a Call for Proposals for BAAP annually. This Call will be accompanied by a detailed NRF Application and Funding Guide explaining the information to be included in the NRF online application. Applicants will be invited to apply for funding in one (1) of the following two (2) tracks:

- **PhD Track:** for applicants registered for a PhD degree; and
- **Post-PhD Track:** for applicants intending to pursue Post-PhD research training.

5.2 Call Requirements

Applications must be submitted by each South African public university in response to the call for applications. University management is required to implement processes to ensure that the NRF receives complete and well-motivated applications by the closing date. In this regard, universities are encouraged to form strategic partnerships with other universities for proposal development, co-supervision and/or support for emerging research development.

The number of applications that may be submitted by each university, in either track, is not limited. However, incomplete applications and applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be returned without review.

Applicants in the PhD track may apply for one (1) of the following:

- A three-year grant to undertake and complete a PhD degree;
- A one- or two-year grant for completion of the PhD degree, if the degree is in progress;

- A six (6) month grant for completion of a PhD degree, if the degree is near completion; or
- A three-year grant to spend at least one (1) year completing the PhD degree and the remaining period undertaking Post-PhD research training.

Applicants in the Post-PhD track may apply for a one- or two-year grant to undertake a period of Post-PhD research training that must include a period of research training at an international university or research institution outside of South Africa or, in industry either in South Africa or abroad.

Each application must include the following two motivations for the application to be considered for funding.

DVC Nomination

A detailed letter of nomination under the signature of **the DVC Research** at the university where the academic is employed, is a requirement for the application to be considered for funding.

This attached letter of motivation must detail (i) the reasons for nominating the candidate; (ii) the alignment with the university research and academic staffing plan; and (iii) any strategic partnership with other universities for proposal development, co-supervision and/or support for emerging researcher development.

The letter must also clearly state the duration for which the applicant will be released from teaching and administrative responsibilities. Individuals that hold joint appointments with universities and clinical appointments with the provincial Department of Health will be eligible for nomination provided that there is a commitment from the university to release the applicant from all lecturing and administrative duties, to focus on research and postgraduate training, for the duration of the BAAP grant.

Applicant's Self-motivation

A detailed self-motivation from the applicant detailing his/her academic and research career plan and the benefits and intended outcomes to be achieved through the BAAP grant is a requirement for the application to be considered for funding.

This motivation must be uploaded in the attachment section of the application.

6 Eligibility

6.1 Eligibility Criteria for applicants

The following general eligibility criteria apply **to all applicants**:

- Applicants must be Black, South African citizens or South African citizens with a disability;
- Applicants must hold a permanent, full-time academic appointment at one of the 26 public universities in South Africa, or a fixed-term appointment that extends for the

full grant period plus one additional year.

- Applicants must not have received or hold a valid NRF A, B, C, or P rating at the time of commencement of the programme. Should an NRF Evaluation and Rating application and the BAAP application be submitted simultaneously and both are successful, then the BAAP grant will not be awarded.
- This grant may not be held concurrently with a Thuthuka Grant, New Generation Academics Programme (nGAP) scholars, a grant as a Director of an NRF Centre of Excellence (CoE), Institute or Centre, South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) grant, any NRF Knowledge Advancement and Support (KAS) grants, NRF postgraduate student bursary, Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR) and any Established Researcher grant.

6.2 PhD Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply, **at the time of application**, in respect of the PhD Track.

Applicants must:

- Be registered for a PhD degree in any discipline;
- Not be older than forty-five (45) years of age;
- Have a proposed PhD research project, supported by the nominated supervisor.

6.3 Post-PhD Track

The following eligibility criteria will apply, **at the time of application**, in respect of the Post-PhD Track.

Applicants must:

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

6.4 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 in accordance with institutional ethical policies and procedures. The ethical clearance approval should be held by the institution and the grant holder and accessible on request.

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

7 Proposal Screening and Review Processes

Following the institutional and NRF screening processes, proposals that meet the eligibility criteria and application requirements will be subjected to peer-review to assess substantive issues such as scientific merit and any other pre-determined content criteria, as outlined in the scorecard (refer to Table 1 below). Based on the outcomes of the review process, applications will either be eligible for funding or not. The application must include a detailed well-structured project plan which outlines the following:

- Project schedule/Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) with the work divided into manageable activities linked to specific time-bound outcomes for each year (i.e. list of tasks/activities/objectives linked to timelines and expected outputs); and
- Project budget - listing activities, costs and detailed motivation towards efficient use of resources for each year (refer to Application and Funding guide for more information).

Applicants intending to progress from the PhD to Post-PhD Track must include a clear detailed project plan that outlines all the planned activities, timelines and expected outputs for each year. The use of Project schedule/Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) or Gantt chart is encouraged which may be accessed through the internet.

Note that applicants must include clear research outputs which are aligned to timelines, particularly targeted conferences and possible publications in credible peer-reviewed journals to be considered for funding.

A selection committee will consider the recommendations from the review process and assess the budget requests in order to make the final awards for successful BAAP applications. The selection committee will comprise of representatives from the NRF and FRF. Grant approvals and awards will be done in accordance with NRF auditing requirements.

Table 1: NRF Scorecard for the Assessment of Proposals for the BAAP

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting
Institutional Nomination	Reasons for nominating the candidate by the DVC should be fully motivated in the nomination letter. Alignment with the university research and academic staffing plan: the nomination letter clearly indicates how the proposed research is aligned with the host university research strategy and staffing plan; Strategic partnership with other universities for proposal development, co-supervision and/or support for emerging research development are clearly stated.	10%
Applicant's Motivation	The applicant's academic and research career plan; The applicant's academic and research career plan is described in explicit detail. The current and anticipated challenges that may impede progress or cause delays in the proposed plan are clearly stated and the proposed mitigation or preventative actions are clearly described. Benefits and intended outcomes to be achieved from this programme are clearly stated.	10%
Track record of the applicant	Past research outputs that outline the candidate's research experience and contributions to knowledge production. Outputs could be from the past 5 years (or from a longer period in the past). This could include journal articles/peer reviewed publications, conference presentations and proceedings, book chapters, patents and awards, designs, performances, student supervision and/or expertise in a specified knowledge area that will enable the applicant to successfully undertake the proposed research.	10%
Scientific Merit and Contribution to New Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The proposal is comprehensive and well-constructed. • Research novelty refers to whether project idea is novel and will contribute to the generation of both new methodologies and new knowledge in the field. • The study is well conceptualized: i.e.,the problem statement; research question aligns with methodology; the rationale of the study, research approach and methodology are clearly articulated, the aim is clear and objectives align with a problem statement. • Alignment of the overall research proposal with the (i) objectives of the funding programme - proposal fit within the scope of the Call, (ii) the applicant's institutional research strategy & (iii) specified national research strategies. • Literature is thoroughly reviewed, relevant, cited in text and well referenced, and addresses the existing gaps in extant literature. • Pluri disciplinarity: The multi-, inter, and trans - disciplinary aspects of the proposed study; The project addresses one or more aspects of pluri disciplinarity. 	30%
Project management and Feasibility	<p>Project Management and Feasibility - this is a description of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project organisation detailing the composition of project teams, roles & responsibilities and contributions of all identified roles; research activities and supervision. • Project scheduling/work plan detailing the project work breakdown structure comprising the project tasks, activities, timelines (in line with the funding period) and outputs • Project budget plan defined by effective planning of the budget, listing the line items and related costs in consideration of project objectives, activities, outputs and additional services required to produce outputs (such as DNA sequencing services possibly rendered abroad). 	20%
Expected Outputs	Aligned to instrument objectives. This could include the - Professional development of the applicant and research outputs such as journal articles; conference presentations and proceedings; and books and patents. The achievability of the proposed outputs within the given timeframe.	5%

Criterion	Review Dimensions	% Weighting
<p>Knowledge Production Impact and Broader Societal Impact</p>	<p>This could include detailing the potential/contribution of the study outcomes to the strategic goals of the knowledge economy and advancement of discovery and understanding of the field; and/or demonstrated high return on investment and embedding of specified realistic societal benefits (e.g. social, economic, environmental) ex-ante (potential) ex-nunc (during) and ex-post (after) the implementation of study in the proposal; e.g., the project could have the potential to resolve taxonomic problems to unlock knowledge critical to other projects related to the bioeconomy or global change; Identifying the end-users of both the knowledge/information produced; dissemination format of generated knowledge/information, the extent to which the project will contribute to the funding opportunity deliverables. The return on investment (quantifying records of generated/mobilised, species pages compiled, or species/specimens barcoded). Align assessment to clear articulation of Scientific Merit.</p>	<p>10%</p>
<p>Ethical considerations, Data Management and Use</p>	<p>Ethical issues including data sharing and collecting/import/export permits, specimen repository has been considered. The proposal should clearly indicate how expected findings and outputs will be disseminated including the use of science communication strategies, and open access. Data management and use: The proposal should clearly indicate how expected findings and outputs will be disseminated including the use of science communication strategies, and open access.</p>	<p>5%</p>

8 Funding Support

8.1 Award and Period of funding

Successful applications will be awarded funding for one of the following categories:

- Six (6) months for completion of a PhD degree;
- One (1), two (2) or three (3) years for the PhD Track; or
- One (1) or two (2) years for the Post-PhD Track.

Note that the six (6) months grant is only applicable to those applicants who are at an advanced stage with their PhD studies and who require time-release for completion of their PhD degree.

The budget request for each year of the grant period should be submitted with the first application. The release of continued funding for the second and third year will be linked to the grantholder's progress. The grantholder will be required to submit a detailed Progress Report (PR) to the NRF, on the NRF Connect system, at the end of each academic year. Approved funding beyond the first year will only be released upon submission of the approved PR to the NRF.

8.2 Types of Financial Support

The BAAP grants will be funded to a set maximum amount for each budget category, subject to budget availability. The grant is intended to fund three (3) distinct budget categories:

Running Expenses to a maximum value of one hundred thousand rand (R100 000) per year.

Please note that Running Expenses for applicants requesting a BAAP grant for six (6) months is limited to a maximum of fifty thousand rand (R50 000).

Running expenses must be motivated for in detail and may include projected costs for the budget line items listed below:

- Hardware and Supplies (Materials and supplies);
 - Includes costs for editing of PhD thesis
 - Includes costs to attend a workshop
- International Conferences (travel and subsistence) include airfare and accommodation;
- Local Conference (travel and subsistence) includes airfare and accommodation;
- Local Travel (travel and subsistence) includes airfare and accommodation;
- Research Equipment;
- Science Engagement; and
- Research/Technical/Ad Hoc Assistants.

The following categories of support on the application form are **NOT** supported under Running Expenses for BAAP:

- Accommodation (to be included where applicable under International

- conference, Local conference of Local Travel);
 - Airfare (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference or Local travel);
 - Costs for joint conferences and workshops; and
 - Subsistence (to be included where applicable under International conference, Local conference or Local travel).
- **Lecturer replacement costs** to a maximum value of two hundred thousand rand (R200 000) per year.
Note that lecturer replacement costs for applicants requesting a BAAP grant for six (6) months is limited to a maximum of one hundred thousand rand (R100 000).

These costs must be motivated with a detailed cost breakdown and institutions are encouraged to appoint replacement candidates that are Black South African citizens to create opportunities for their career development. Should the lecturer replacement costs exceed the NRF maximum amount, the shortfall must be covered by other sources of funding.

- **International travel** to a maximum value of one hundred thousand rand (R100 000). This is only applicable to applicants in the **Post-PhD Track**.

NRF Exclusions for Financial Support

- Indirect costs or institutional overheads;
- Registration fees for PhD enrolment;
- Basic office equipment;
- General stationery, photocopying and printing costs;
- Journal publications, journal subscription costs and textbooks;
- Telephone, fax and internet costs;
- Personal laptops, computer hardware, and purchase or renewal of software licenses unless for specialised equipment and software licences;
- Netbooks, hand-held notebooks, and personal digital assistant (PDA) devices;
- Any funding item that is listed as: "miscellaneous", "other" or "etc";
- Visa and permit fees;
- Events not attached to a conference;
- Presentation of the same work at multiple conferences;
- Attendance of more than one conference abroad per year;
- Meetings, workshops, networking and collaboration event; and
- Administrative and/or secretarial support;

Applicants with a disability as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), may apply to the NRF for additional support for assistive devices following the approval of the award. An assistive technology device is "*any piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities*".

8.2.1 Postgraduate Support

This programme does not include support for postgraduate students supervised by the applicant. However, applicants are encouraged to include student supervision as it forms an

integral part of their career advancement.

Postgraduate students to be supervised by BAAP grantholders must apply for NRF postgraduate funding independently in the open competitive Call for Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships. Only students intending to pursue full-time postgraduate studies will be eligible for NRF postgraduate student funding. These students will be prioritized for funding pending eligibility and budget.

All postgraduate students will be expected to apply on the NRF Connect system by accessing the link: <https://nrfconnect.nrf.ac.za/>.

For further details on the NRF Postgraduate Funding policy, kindly refer to the framework document which will be available on <https://www.nrf.ac.za/funding/> when the Call for Applications for Postgraduate Scholarships opens in **April 2024**.

9 Conditions of award for the Black Academics Advancement Programme

- Successful applicants will be required to sign a Conditions of Grant (CoG) document with the NRF and the university.
- Applicants should have obtained university Research and Higher Degrees Committee approval for the PhD research proposal.
- Ethical Clearance procedures for the respective university should be followed and applied. Approval of the ethical clearance should be held by the respective university.
- Applicants under the PhD Track, should be registered for the PhD degree at a public university in South Africa.
- This grant **may not** be held concurrently with NRF Thuthuka or nGAP grant or any scholarships or fellowships.
- This grant may be held with another NRF research grant, in accordance with the NRF multiple grants eligibility table.
- Applicants must spend 80% of their time each year on research-related activities and, may not spend more than 20% of their time each year, on postgraduate teaching and supervision duties during the time-off period.
- Grantholders registered for a PhD degree will be required to provide proof of PhD graduation within one (1) year of completion of the programme.
- Post-PhD Track candidates are expected to complete the programme within the two-year period.
- All grantholders must submit a PR on the NRF Connect system, by 15 February of each year, indicating the nature (e.g. journal articles, book chapters, books) and quality (e.g. impact factor of the journal) of outputs produced, grant applications prepared and/or submitted within one year of completion of the three-year programme.
- In addition to the annual PR submitted, all grantholders must complete an NRF administered annual online BAAP Survey for the full duration of the BAAP grant and, a further five (5) years after the funding period has ended. The BAAP Survey will focus on tracking the achievements and career advancement of BAAP beneficiaries.
- Upon completion of the programme, grantholders will be required to continue working

at a South African public university or research institution or, at a Civil Society Organisation for a maximum period of three (3) years or an equivalent period of the grant.

- The maximum period for repayments will be equal to the duration of the grant and will start as soon as the discontinuation is registered with the NRF.
- Should the grantholder decide to discontinue the programme, he/she should inform the NRF in writing 30 days prior to the exit of the programme. This grant is non-transferable and will be cancelled within 30 days of receipt of written official notification by the NRF.
- Should a grantholder discontinue or fail to successfully complete his or her PhD studies, or resign from the employer of a South African public university before completion of their funded degree, or not finish his or her in-service payback period, he/she will be required to repay the full grant amount, or in the case of not finishing his or her in-service payback period, pay a pro-rata grant amount, with zero percent interest to the NRF. Under such instances the grantholder will enter into an acknowledgement of debt with the NRF. The grantholder should submit a progress report upon exit.
- There will be special provision made in the event of ill-health, maternity and bereavement leave. The grantholder shall inform the NRF no later than a week of any of these occurrences. The grant payment will be deferred while the individual is on paid maternity leave, or extended sick or special leave exceeding two (2) calendar months.

9.1 Reporting

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

- Grantholders are required to submit a PR on the NRF Connect system by 15 February of the subsequent year.
- In cases of international visits where the grantholder is hosted by someone who is not their PhD supervisor or Post-PhD mentor, a report from the international host, must be submitted after each visit to the applicant's institution and attached to the PR submitted to the NRF.
- After the final visit by the visiting mentor, reports by both the host and the mentees must be submitted to the institution and attached to the PR when submitted to the NRF.
- PhD Track grantholders will be required to provide proof of PhD graduation within one (1) year of the completion of the programme or PhD degree in the case of a combined PhD and Post-PhD grant.
- All grantholders will be required to submit a PR at the end of the funding period be it six (6) months, one (1), two- (2) or three- (3) years indicating the impact of the programme on the grantholder's research track record and academic standing.
- Post-PhD Track candidates are expected to complete within the two (2) year period and must submit a PR indicating the nature (e.g. journal article, book chapter, and book) and quality (e.g. impact factor of journal) of outputs produced, grant applications prepared and/or submitted within one (1) year of completion of the programme period.

9.2 Contact Details

When making an enquiry, please use “Black Academics Advancement Programme” as the email subject line.

For funding instrument-related enquiries, please contact:

<p>Ms Nthabeleng Makhetha Professional Officer: Emerging Researchers (HICD) Tel: (012) 481 4150 E-mail: N.Makhetha@risa.nrf.ac.za</p>	<p>Ms Tshepiso Masemola Professional Officer: Grants Management and Systems Administration (GMSA) Tel: (012) 481 4336 E-mail: T.Masemola@risa.nrf.ac.za</p>
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For technical NRF Connect enquiries, please contact the NRF Support Desk during office hours from 08:00 to 16:30 from Monday to Friday.

E-mail: supportdesk@nrf.ac.za

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