



RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANTS FOR

Y-RATED RESEARCHERS

KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT AND SUPPORT

Framework Document

February 2024

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1. DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNDING INSTRUMENT

Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers is an instrument to support ring-fenced, once-off grants that is competitive and discipline-based in nature. The instrument is aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the National Research Foundation (NRF) to drive 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:

- i. A valid NRF Y-rating of the principal applicant;**
- ii. 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 Origin Platforms (Palaeosciences), Global Change Grand Challenge, South African National Antarctic Programme, and Marine research, among others. 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 supports identified fields, disciplines and funding instruments, the NRF through the Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers does not guide the direction of research of the applicants. However, research informed by the national priorities would be of particular interest in the context of contributing to wider system objectives.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The NRF contributes to national development by:

- i. 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;
- ii. Developing, supporting and maintaining national research facilities;
- iii. Supporting and promoting public awareness of, and engagement with science; and
- iv. Promoting the development and maintenance of the national science system and support of Government priorities.

Vision 2030

The overall objectives for Vision 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 an 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; and
- iv. An organization that has been transformed and is living 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 both basic and applied research. Support for basic disciplinary research is 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 and that increasingly, the notion of "frontier research" transcends the distinction of basic and applied research and refers to leading edge research which is risky and often across different disciplines.

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 geographic advantage areas.

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the funding instrument are to:

- i. 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;
- ii. Contribute to knowledge production across the research spectrum;

- iii. Achieve world-class research and to develop the associated human capacity.
- iv. Provide dedicated support to emerging and promising researchers to strengthen their research portfolio and contribute towards their achievement of established researcher status; and
- v. Advance or develop paradigms, theories and methodological innovation across the research spectrum.

2.3 Financing support

The Research Development Grants for Y-Rated Researchers is made possible through contract funding from the DSI. **Each application may request funding of not 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.

2.4 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 DSI. These include mainly, Public Universities, Museums, National Research Facilities and Science Councils

3. MODUS OPERANDI

3.1 Call for proposals

All applications must be submitted electronically via the NRF connect system at <https://nrfconnect.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 himself / herself with the internal closing dates, set by his/ her institution in order to meet the NRF closing date included in the “General Application Guide 2023”.

3.2 Eligibility

- i. 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.
- ii. Each new Principal Investigator **may only submit ONE** application to this call.
- iii. Principal Investigators **must choose** between submitting an application in this funding instrument or in the Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers (CPRR). Application submitted to this instrument will not be reviewed if there is another application that is submitted for CPRR funding.
- iv. 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**, may submit an application.

- v. 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 fulfil a very specific function for the latter does not qualify for support.
- vi. 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 for 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.

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 will be requested to provide between 6 and 10 possible reviewers. It is in the applicant's best interest to ensure that the selected reviewers are aware of the submission and are thus likely to respond. It is also in the applicant's best interest to ensure that selected reviewers have no possible conflict of interest in submitting a review; should that be the case review reports will be dismissed without consideration.

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 a 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 Online Submission System at <https://nrffconnect.nrf.ac.za>.

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

3.5 Rules of participation

i. Principal Investigator

Only Y-rated researchers based at the 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 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.

ii. Co-investigators/partner principal investigator

A co-investigator/partner principal 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/partner principal 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-investigator/partner principal investigator 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

iii. 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 Data management and use

A data management plan (DMP) is a formal document that describes the data expected to be acquired or generated during the course of a research project, how the data will be managed, described, analyzed, and stored, and what mechanisms (including digital data storage) will be used at the end of the project to share and preserve the 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 of the data generated is 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 should be 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 NRF has adopted and is given permission to use the DCC Checklist for Data Management Plan, 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

3.7 Science Engagement

The NRF supports science engagement through its coordination and implementation of the Department of Science and Innovation's 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, including science awareness, science education, science communication and science outreach, which aims 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.

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 funds are released upon acceptance of the conditions of grant, both by the applicant and their 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:

- i. Materials and Supplies
- ii. Travel and subsistence
- iii. Research / Technical / *Ad hoc* Assistants
- iv. 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. **Applications must adhere to set budget limits presented in these guidelines; exceeding these limits may result in the approval of a reduced budget by the NRF.**

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 be 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:

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

Travel and subsistence

- i. 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.
- ii. 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.

- iii. 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 the number of people attending each local conference.
- iv. 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.
- v. Local accommodation costs should not exceed a 3-star establishment
- vi. 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.

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.

4.3 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. ENQUIRIES

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6. LIST OF ACRONYMS

CPRR	Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
DMP	Data Management Plan
GMSA	Grants Management and Systems Administration
KAS	Knowledge Advancement and Support
NRF	National Research Foundation
PI	Principal Investigator
RE	Reviews and Evaluation
RISA	Research Innovation Support and Advancement

7. ANNEXURE 1: Panel Assessment Scorecard for 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 logistics and technical feasibility as proposed		45%
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?		10%
Impact	Wider impact	Has the possibility for economic, societal or environmental impact been appropriately embedded in the proposal?		10%
Data management and use	Data management plan	A data management plan (DMP) is a formal document that describes the data expected to be acquired or generated during the course of a research project, how the data will be managed, described, analyzed, and stored, and what mechanisms (including digital data storage) will be used at the end of the project to share and preserve the data		10%
Totals				100%

8. 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.
<p>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.</p>		