Masters and Doctoral Scholarships
GUIDELINES
2016
1. Introduction

This Manual provides an overview of the masters and doctoral scholarship funding instruments, application funding guidelines and processes. It should be read in conjunction with the funding instrument call or framework document, which can be accessed at https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za. It does not, however, constitute a complete set of the policies, procedures or systems used by the NRF.

2. Application Process

The NRF issues a call for masters and doctoral scholarship applications that is published on the NRF website and is accessible online at https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za. The masters and doctoral scholarships funding instruments will not accept more than one application per applicant per year. All applications must be duly authorised and approved by the Designated Authority (DA) of the research administration at the institution that submits the application. Applications must be submitted electronically to the institutional DA of the submitting institution for validation at the deadline date determined by individual institutions. Please enquire at your institution regarding their internal closing dates. The processing of a successful grant application takes approximately five (5) months from the time of submission until the commencement of funding.

3. How to Submit Applications

Applications may be completed on the NRF Online Submission System at https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za from Monday, 22 June 2015. Applicants are advised to complete their applications as soon as possible to prevent IT system overload nearer the closing date.

Step 1: This is an electronic submission system and applicants must be registered on the system in order to create and complete an application. If you were registered on the NRF Online System (http://nrfonline.nrf.ac.za) before February 2012, your details would have been migrated to the new NRF Online Submission System (https://nrfsubmission.nrf.ac.za). If you experience problems accessing the system with your NRF Online password, use the Reset Password button. If you are not yet registered on the NRF Online Submission System, you must register to access the application form.
Step 2: Once you have logged onto the NRF Online Submission System, on the landing page, go to the left hand side black menu (tab indicated with blue arrow) to create a new application, go to My Applications-Create Application.
Step 3: Select the funding call for which you are applying on the create application screen, this will open up a new application for you to complete. Please note that this should be selected only once. To continue working on an application, go to My Applications - List of Applications.
**Step 4:** Applicants are urged to complete or update ALL screens of the CV, including the Research Profile and Research Outputs (if applicable), as this information is evaluated in the review process and will impact on the overall assessment of your application.

**Step 5:** All sections marked with a red asterisks are compulsory sections in the application. These sections must be completed in order for the final submit button to appear. The sections without asterisks are non-compulsory sections. You may enter information in these sections, if you have information to enter, such as research outputs. Completed sections will be indicated by a green tick on the main menu, while incomplete sections will have a yellow cross.
All compulsory sections will guide you with error messages. Please follow these messages to help you complete the section correctly.

**Step 6:** Most application screens have screen and application specific instructions to help you work through the section. Please read the instruction carefully before completing the section.

**Step 7:** *The Research Project* Information section will require you to select, from a drop down list, your proposed institution. If your institution is not on the list, please request by selecting the information or new button next to the question.
**Step 8:** In the academic achievement section, please enter your academic average from your previous degree by adding up all your marks and dividing by the number of courses. If your institution does not provide a mark, please enter pass in the field. The review panel will compare the scores entered with your requested academic transcript.

The final submit button will only appear once all compulsory sections are completed. Please remember to submit your application for consideration. When an application has been submitted by the applicant, it is automatically routed to the Designated Authority (DA) in the Research Office or Post Graduate Funding Office of the institution that you have selected, for internal review and validation. Late applications, additional supporting documentation or information received after the closing date will not be accepted or considered.
Step 9: The Details of Research section is one of the most important sections in the application. Please provide an overview of your proposed research study in these sections. The section has specific instructions related to each screen. Follow the instructions to complete the section. It is important that you enter detailed information into this section as the input is taken into consideration during the assessment of your application. Appropriate literature references must also be included.
Step 10: The attachment section provides specific instructions for uploading attachments to the application. Please print, certify and then scan in all documents together to be submitted as one attachment, save as a single PDF file and then upload the section as one document. If you are a student with disabilities, you may also upload a medical certificate in support of your disability.
**Step 11:** The reference section allows you to include referees for your application. Please make sure your referees are academic referees and can comment on your academic abilities. On final submission of the application the reference emails are sent to referees to provide a report on your academic abilities. **It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that the referee email is correct and that the referees have responded as this category is assessed in the application.** The applicant can view the application PDF to check whether a referee has responded to the request for reference.

**Step 12:** Applicants must ensure that they adhere to their institution’s internal closing date for submission of their application to allow for internal institutional screening and review. The internal closing date will be determined by the respective research offices or Post Graduate Office and is usually at least two weeks prior to the NRF’s closing date.

It is important for all proposals to be screened and approved through internal institutional processes **before** being submitted to the NRF. The NRF assumes that the respective DAs are satisfied with the standard of all proposals validated and submitted, and that the institution approves and supports the proposed research.

**Step 13:** The final submit button will appear only if all compulsory sections are complete. If all the compulsory sections are complete and the final submit button does not appear, please select any section, and resave to refresh the application. You will then see the final submit button. Once you have selected final submit button, the application will be routed to your hosting institution for validation and further consideration by the NRF.

**The NRF will not process applications that are incomplete, contain insufficient or incorrect detail, or fail to comply with instructions.** Such applications will be rejected. The application must be completed in sufficient detail to allow for a comprehensive review and evaluation by internal and external reviewers. In addition to the electronic application and required attachments, the NRF may request additional information or documentation to support an application if required. Failure to supply such information or documentation upon request may result in the rejection of the application.

### 4. Screening and Review Processes

#### 4.1 Overview of the Screening Process

All applications validated by institutions and submitted to the NRF are screened by the NRF for compliance with the requirements of the Call for Proposals as set out in this Manual, as well as the requirements for completing the NRF Online application. Applications that fail to meet the stipulated requirements will be rejected and not considered for funding.
4.2 Overview of the Review Process

The NRF’s peer review policy requires that all applications be subjected to a review process. Applications submitted to this funding instrument will go through a panel review process.

4.2.1 Panel Review

Panel members are selected from the NRF database that is updated on a continuous basis, and other sources. In compiling the review panel, the expertise and experience of individuals in application adjudication are taken into account. In assessing the application, agreed assessment criteria are applied in the form of a scorecard.

The Review Panel provides recommendations to the NRF and the final funding decision is made by the NRF. In awarding grants in this funding instrument, the NRF takes into account the recommendations of the peer review panels, the objectives and targets of the funding instrument, and the available funds.

5. Ranking of Applications

The purpose of the scoring system is to evaluate applications, based on funding instrument criteria, in order to determine applications that are most deserving of the limited funds available. All research scholarship applications submitted to the NRF for funding are evaluated according to a number of predetermined criteria. Applications are assessed and ranked on the basis of criteria as listed in the table below. Each area may be given a weight to indicate its relative importance. Kindly consult the table below for details on the criteria used.
### NRF Scorecard for the Assessment of Master’s and Doctoral Scholarship Applications

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<tr>
<th>Assessment Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **The applicant’s past, current and potential academic performance** | This refers to the academic potential of the applicant, taking into consideration:  
- The potential of the applicant to undertake an independent research project;  
- Journal articles; conference presentations and proceedings; books and book chapters; and patents;  
- Leadership roles; and  
- Previous awards, prizes and honours. |
| **The feasibility and merit of the applicant’s research project proposal;** | Research objectives to match aims of study – Reviewers will assess whether the research objectives are clearly stated and whether they are appropriate to meet the aims of the study; are sound but have inconsistencies and can be refined; are appropriate but only partially address the aims of the study; or are not appropriate to meet the aims of the study.  
Research methodology to match research objectives – Reviewers will comment on whether the research methodology is appropriate to meet objectives of study; is sound but has inconsistencies and can be refined; is appropriate but only partially addresses study objectives; or not appropriate to meet objectives of study.  
Research Plan - is the research plan feasible and detailed.  
For students doing a Masters by coursework and dissertation, some idea of the research topic and understanding is required for assessment. |
| **References** | Referee’s reports are considered in the assessment of the application. These provide an account of the student’s academic capabilities in relation to the research and the research field. The reviewers will look for consistencies in the reference reports as well as support for the applicant, proposed research study, capacity to host the research (if required) and evidence of institutional infrastructure or resources to support the applicant and the research. |
| **Research outputs and publication plan** | Reviewers will assess whether the study has a potential for outputs in terms of knowledge generation, e.g. publications or patents and potential impact. |
6. Applications Feedback and Disputes

Once the review and assessment processes have been completed and the recommended funding decision has been approved by the NRF, the NRF will publish a list of successful applications on the NRF website, www.nrf.ac.za. Thereafter, successful applicants will receive a letter of award. The application status online will not indicate whether or not the application has been approved for funding. This funding instrument does not provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants; if your name does not appear on the published list of successful applications it means that your application was unsuccessful.

Should an unsuccessful applicant require feedback, they are requested to follow the appeals process and queries via their institutional office. The NRF does not provide feedback to all unsuccessful applicants due to the high volume of applicants within this funding instrument.

Unsuccessful applicants that wish to appeal the funding decision taken by the NRF must follow the appropriate Appeals Process of the NRF. Appeals will only be considered for this funding instrument within a two month period after the official date of publishing of the results on the NRF website.

7. Awardee Responsibilities

7.1 Reporting

Continued funding beyond the first year is dependent on the submission of an Annual Progress Report (APR) to the NRF during a call for APR’s in October / November of each grant year. Continued funding will be considered based on satisfactory progress.

An APR must be submitted by the awardee / grant-holder in a format provided by the NRF, documenting progress made against set objectives and research outputs. The NRF may in consultation with the Research Office, request interim progress reports for the purpose of implementing corrective measures timeously to ensure that stated objectives are met within stipulated timeframes.

7.2 Managing changes during the project life cycle

Changes may occur during the project life cycle due to unforeseen and extenuating circumstances. Please note the following on how to manage the award and subsequent changes (planned or unanticipated) should they arise during the project life cycle.
7.2.1 Change Requests

7.2.1.1 Prior Approval Requests
Applicants must submit all change requests in writing to the NRF for approval before effecting any changes. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office / Post graduate funding Office for approval prior to the change.

7.2.1.2 Changes in Project Scope, Supervisor or Institution
Changes may occur where a project scope, supervisor or institution needs to be changed from the original research proposal, supervisor or institution respectively. The request must have institutional DA endorsement and be submitted to the NRF via the Research Office. Such requests must be forwarded to the NRF 30 days before the change is intended to take place.

8. Scientific Compliance

8.1 Methodology
The student takes scientific responsibility for the research to be undertaken, including its objectives and the methodology outlined in the project proposal. The student is required to devote the necessary time to the research project in compliance with the workplan for the research proposal approved by the NRF so as to achieve the project’s stated aims and objectives.

8.2 Intellectual Property Rights
The intellectual capital generated by NRF funded research must be appropriately protected and exploited for the benefit of South Africa. This condition should not interfere with the Intellectual Property Rights arrangements already made, on condition that the majority of the benefits arising from the intellectual capital accrue to South Africa and its citizens. This condition is aligned with the Intellectual Property Rights Act, 1 which will override this condition of grant.

8.3 Ethics
The student is required to maintain the highest ethical and safety standards in conducting the research, particularly when human and animal subjects are involved. It remains the responsibility of the project leader to comply with all relevant regulations in this regard, including those of the institution at which the research is carried out. An ethical clearance certificate (where applicable) must be submitted to the NRF in respect of successful applications before funding can be released.
List of References