

General Principles for Accessing Funding from the NRF

1. Overview of the NRF Funding Programme

- a) This document is issued as a general brief to all those who wish to request for funding from the National Research Fund (NRF). The brief will be revised regularly and availed through NRF website: www.researchfund.go.ke.
- b) NRF is a statutory body under the Ministry of Education established through the Science, Technology and Innovation ST&I Act No. 28, Section 32, of 2013. The Mandate of the Fund is to facilitate research for the advancement of Science, Technology and Innovation as provided in Section 33 of the ST&I Act, 2013.
- c) The function of NRF is to mobilize, allocate and manage financial resources to facilitate an effective National Innovation System that would create required knowledge and innovations in all fields of Science and Technology for the growing economy.
- d) In respect to the above, the NRF operates a number of strategic funding schemes, some which are competitive grant awards comprising of training scholarships, postgraduate research fellowships, multidisciplinary research, institutional support grants and support for conferences all aimed at strengthening the national research capacity.
- e) This document provides a high level summary of the general principles for the granting programmes of the NRF and is issued as a brief to the various stakeholders of the Fund.

2. Types of Grants available from NRF

The Fund has consolidated its funding programmes under the following schemes:

- a) Research Partnership Funding Programme in collaboration with major institutional partners such as the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), Kenya National Innovation Agency (KENIA) and Commission for Higher Education (CUE) among others innovation actors.
- b) Competitive Research Granting Programme comprising of training scholarships, postgraduate research fellowships, multidisciplinary research grants, post-doctoral research grants and institutional support grants all aimed at strengthening the national research capacity in the key sectors of the economy. Support of
- c) Conferences and symposia to enhance sharing of knowledge and linkages is also an important programme.

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- d) Bilateral Funding Programme in partnership with international funding agencies for areas of mutual interest to strengthen technical cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation.
- e) Strategic Research Funding Programme is provided to resource special research activities considered to be of priority to the developmental needs of the country.
- f) Research Priming Grants are provided as development grants to aid in proof of concept activities to enable researchers prepare make evidence based applications.
- g) Contract research: to enhance private sector funding of research through NRF. This is funds for targeted research to address a specific issue in a sector/industry.

3. Requesting for funding from the NRF

- a) NRF can be approached for funding by responding to national Requests for Funding Applications (RFA). In rare circumstances, NRF may consider unsolicited proposals. In such cases, the applicant must formerly submit a Letter of Intent (LoI) specifying purpose and why they consider their proposal should be funded out of the RFA process.
- b) NRF also provides strategic funding for developmental sectors in the country. This funding is guided by national priorities set out by NACOSTI as stipulated in the ST&I Act, 2013 in each sector. The themes for calls for proposals will also be informed by the identified national research priorities.

4. Principles, Guidelines and Procedures for Accessing Funding from NRF

General Provisions

- a) These principles, guidelines and procedures apply to all funding awarded by and through NRF. In addition, specific procedures are set out and under each funding category.
- b) NRF awards grants competitively to institutions and individuals to implement activities in accordance with the approved strategic plan, national research priorities and annual Workplan and budget.
- c) Application formats, funding levels and grant criteria vary with each funding programme.
- d) Those wishing to access the funding are expected to adhere to set regulatory and basic principles of research ethics as set by the NRF.
- e) No funds will be provided for the preparation of applications or provision for the cost of developing a concept paper or the full proposal.

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- f) The proposed project must focus on the thematic research areas that are in the RFA.
- g) Awarded grants are not transferable to any other person or institution without prior written approval from NRF.
- h) The proposals must be endorsed by the Chief Executive Officers as well as Heads of Finance of the applicant institutions.
- i) Proposed budgets should not exceed the advertised limits.

Specific Provisions

- a) National Request for Applications (RFA) - Institutions and individuals researchers/Innovators will only apply for support after publication of adverts calling for proposals.
- b) Merit Review of Applications – All eligible proposals submitted to NRF will undergo a formal merit review process undertaken by experienced external and independent peer reviewers. The reviewers are research and academic experts who are assembled through a national call process. The reviewers are constituted into Adhoc External Merit Review Committee (EMRC) of the NRF on need basis. Funding applications received by the NRF undergo through a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which generally may comprises of the following steps:
 - Screening for eligibility
 - Desk Review by EMRC to determine the shortlist
 - Interview conducted by EMRC to rank based on merit performance and recommend those that merit funding
 - Review of the budget proposal by appointed financial experts
 - Reference checks
 - Site visits
 - Discussion by the Board of Trustees of the NRF
 - Award of grants
- c) Award of Grants to successful applicants

Applications that are recommended by external reviewers for funding will be discussed by the Technical Committee (TC) of the Board of Trustees before approval by the full Board. The decision of the Board is final. Applicants that are ratified by the Board will receive notification of the award and will be provided with detailed Letters of Offer and a Contract for their consideration and signing. The contract letters will specify, among others, the following details:

- The grant amount approved and project period
- Plan for monitoring progress of funded projects (e.g. disbursement of funds, when and how, regularity of progress reports etc.);
- Process for contract renewal and termination;

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- Publication and Dissemination (acknowledgement of NRF funding in reports and papers, submission of electronic and hard copy of reports to the NRF.);
 - Ownership of equipment and related property after project completion; and
 - Intellectual property issues.
- h) Feedback to Mechanisms – NRF will provide a detailed feedback on performance to each applicant.
 - i) Strengthening the National Capacity for competitive participation–NRF will continually build capacity of researchers and institutions to effectively respond to various calls for proposals in different funding categories.
 - j) Evaluation and monitoring of funded projects- M&E of funded projects will be carried out regularly. NRF will offer capacity strengthening to institutions to build their internal M&E mechanisms to ensure maximum impact of funded programmes
 - k) Applicant institutions are responsible to file any taxes as required by law.
 - l) The time frame from submission of proposals to announcement of awards is expected not to exceed three months.
 - m) Calls for applications will give details of the purpose, research area, application deadline, adjudication procedure and award process.
 - n) Applicants are encouraged to collaborate based on multidisciplinary and multi institutional for better use of the NRF resources.
 - o) NRF will acknowledge receipt of all applications submitted.
 - p) Applications with an inbuilt capacity strengthening or training component are strongly encouraged.
 - q) All applications must specify the dissemination process for their findings. This must include depositing the results of their research with the NRF appointed repository.
 - r) Proposals should minimize costs and maximize outcomes and/or impact.
 - s) NRF will have a stake in all intellectual property rights arising from all projects funded by it.

Eligibility:

- i). Awarded research project must address an important problems or opportunities; have specified outputs and target a defined group of users or beneficiaries

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ii). Applicant(s) of Competitive research grants must:-

- The principal investigator must be resident in Kenya. Non-nationals can apply for NRF funding provided they are resident in Kenya
- The applicants must be in possession of at least a Master's degree or its equivalent in a relevant area
- The proposed research must be based on a national priority areas identified by NACOSTI/NRF
- The applicants should be conversant with the national economic development policies and strategies;
- The applicants must have demonstrated competence and experience in areas related to priority areas;
- The partnering and collaborative institutional or corporate entities must formally indicate that they are committed to release identified staff involved in the project and must have the facilities to implement the project.

5. Processing of applications

- a) Calls for proposals will be advertised in the local media, NRF website, scientific journals, institutional notice boards and any other appropriate channels.
- b) NRF will receive and acknowledge all applications
- c) Successful applicants of concept papers will be requested to submit full proposals
- d) Full proposal of each application will be reviewed, scored and ranked by appointed External Merit Review Committee of reviewers.
- e) NRF will determine the number of proposals to be funded and the level of funding. This will be based on available funds/budget management.
- f) There will be feedback to all the applicants on the outcome of their proposals and areas for improvement.
- g) Awards will be made to applicants' institutions who will sign a contract that includes administration of funds according to NRF grant conditions.
- h) Funds will be allocated upfront and released in annual tranches as per grant conditions.
- i) Periodic progress reports will be expected for each project.
- j) Monitoring & Evaluation will be conducted on all funded projects on a regular basis.
- k) At the end of each project, a final report will be submitted to NRF, and will include
 - Full financial report;
 - List of all publications and other outputs arising from the award;
 - List of all trainees who have successfully completed their training under the award;

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- Major capacity building activities completed;
- New networks formed;
- Impact of the project on ST&I sector policies in Kenya/sub-region;
- How any major activities are expected to continue beyond the current grant;

NRF reserves the right not to award any grants if in its view the quality of the applications does not meet the strict criteria for excellence.

6. Evaluation procedure

Each proposal will be evaluated on the basis of set criteria as outlined below

- Scientific excellence of the research project;
- Potential impact and/or applicability of the research findings to ST&I sectoral policies and/or practice;
- Excellence and competence of the applicant(s);
- How the research program benefits the applicants career development, trainees, and the capacity of host institution;
- The potential of the project to develop capacity in the specific area of research which is sustainable in the long-term;
- Involvement of multiple institutions and/or disciplines;
- Plan for utilization and dissemination of knowledge
- Clear laid out project exit strategy to facilitate up-scaling of high impact research outputs.

NRF appointed External Merit Review Committee (EMRC) will ensure that there is no duplication of research and advice applicants to collaborate accordingly

7. Nature of awards

Within a particular proposal, NRF funds may consider covering:

- Personnel emoluments (e.g. stipend for trainees, Allowances for researchers, Allowances for support staff in a project)
- Equipment
- Supplies and consumables
- Travel costs
- Communication (e-mail, courier)
- Essential infrastructure upgrading

Successful applicants must declare any other funding that have been received or applied for towards the same project to be funded by NRF.

8. Feedback mechanisms

The decision of the NRF will be final and a detailed explanation for a decision (either way) on each application will be provided to the applicant.

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9. Administration of the Grant

- The Grant will not be subject to any administrative costs, levies or fees;
- The Grant will be administered through the researchers' host institutions;
- The researchers and institutions shall spend the funds to undertake approved research activities and adhere to the work plan, all as set out in the approved research proposal without any amendments unless with written approval from NRF;
- The Grant shall be released only after the grant contract is duly signed between the NRF, the researchers and their Host institution;
- The funds will be disbursed on yearly basis and the disbursement of project funds for subsequent years will be approved subject to adequate performance/ progress of project implementation;
- The researcher will be obligated to participate in site visits and conferences for monitoring and evaluation of the project activities and dissemination of the findings as NRF may deem necessary.

10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

- The NRF shall carry out formative and summative monitoring and evaluation of all funded projects.
- The approved projects will be subjected to the following reporting and monitoring mechanisms.
 - a) Progress report shall be submitted to NRF on Half-yearly basis during the project duration indicating the milestones covered as per the approved work plan.
 - b) Final technical and financial report to be submitted at the end of project in both hard and electronic copies.

11. Termination of a Funding Contract

The Grant contract may be terminated by either party through a written notice as specified in the grant contract. The NRF shall suspend funding or terminate the Grant agreement if the researcher fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the Grant agreement. The researcher will be required to refund moneys incase of misappropriation and utilization of the fund for purposes not related to the approved project.

12. Publication and Dissemination

The NRF encourages Grant beneficiaries to publish and disseminate their findings. The Grantee should submit copies to NRF of any publications arising out of funded project activities. All published papers and reports must acknowledge support of the NRF.