Standard Operating Procedure for National Research Foundation Grants[1]: Post Awards at Stellenbosch University

1. Funding for staff

1.1. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There is no fixed timeline when opportunities can be expected. The NRF distributes open calls for funding opportunities to all university Research Offices as they become available. SU's Department of Research Development (DRD) then distributes the call to university staff, via a mailing list. Information can also be found on the NRF website (www.nrf.ac.za) under funding opportunities. Calls usually open in the year preceding the first year of the grant.

1.1.1. How to apply

The application process and all other relevant information such as eligibility and funding values are outlined in detail in the call documents. Briefly, applications are either completed online or in MS Word format, depending on specifications in the call document. Please check with the DRD for internal closing dates for applications as this is usually earlier than the closing date of the funding call on the call document or the system.

Upon submission of the application, the DRD's Designated Authority (DA) screens the application and submits it to the NRF for consideration.

1.2. Awards

The NRF issues an award letter to the awardee, together with Grant Conditions, which have to be signed and returned to the NRF via the DRD. Please make sure to initial all pages of the Grant Conditions.

Upon receipt of grant conditions by the NRF, funds are released.

SU's Finance Office (FO) creates a cost centre for each grant. A facility (running expenses and research equipment) is loaded on the cost centre upon submission of grant conditions to the NRF and funds are immediately available for use by the grant-holder, except for bursary funds which are dealt with later in this document.

1.3. Use of funds (running)

Running costs can be used for research related to the project that was approved by the NRF.

1.4. Changes to research

The grant-holder is required to notify the DRD of any changes to the research project, including relocation of the grant holder.

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[1] This exludes Thuthuka, Centres of Excellence, KIC, Incentive Grants, Scholarships and Fellowships and International Bi-Lateral Grants

1.5. Reporting

Annual and final reports are submitted online or manually (depending on each programme). Funds for the following year will not be released until receipt of such report. Even though the funding period of a grant has ended, the NRF may continue to financially support commitment students. In this case, the grant-holder is still required to submit a report. Please refer to grant conditions and DRD for the specific dates. A reminder will also be sent out to grant-holders from the DRD close to the reporting due date.

1.6. Carry forward of funds

Funds awarded to a grant-holder towards operating costs (including running, sabbatical and equipment costs) that are unspent or unclaimed by year-end may have to be motivated for by submitting a carry forward application to the NRF via the DRD.

A call will be circulated by the DRD to grant-holders, usually around January each year, notifying them of the opportunity to apply.

NB: The NRF will NOT consider a request for carry forward of any funds if less than 50% (60% for SARChI) of the total awarded operating costs has been expensed or claimed, Funding brought forward (BF) from the previous financial year, must be fully spent in the current year.

Grant-holders will be able to find out if their motivations have been approved by the NRF around March-April each year.

2. Funding for Students: Grantholder Linked Grants

2.1. Use of bursary funds

NRF bursaries are meant to cover the registration fees and living costs of students. Funds are paid directly to the students accounts and whatever is left is paid out into their personal bank accounts.

The NRF also funds full time staff members at SU or at another research institution who are being supervised or co-supervised by the grant-holder in their NRF funded project. This type of grant is known as the "Staff Development Grant". The bursary funds for this category are used towards operating costs and cost of visiting external supervisor if staff member is from another institution.

2.2. Bursary values and period of support

These vary from programme to programme. Please refer to the call document and bursary conditions or contact the DRD for the correct information.

2.3. Eligibility

Please refer to the call document and bursary conditions or contact the DRD for the correct information. Also see the NRF FAQs document attached.

2.4. Nomination process

The DRD informs all grant-holders when the NRF system opens for nominations. This usually happens around end-January, annually. Please refer to the nomination process document attached for the process and all attachments required.

2.5. Deadlines

NRF closing date for nominations for the full year or first semester is 31 March and grant-holders are advised to submit nominations as soon as possible to avoid the system overload closer to the deadline. Please contact DRD for internal closing date.

N.B. There is no closing date for postdoc nominations, but payments will be pro rata per month.

2.6. Reservation of bursary funds

If you don't have a student to nominate for a full year or first semester but will or is hoping to have one in the second semester, please ask for funds to be reserved by writing to the DRD who will then forward your request to the NRF. If you don't request to reserve funds, it will automatically revert back to the NRF (you lose the funds). For funds reserved for second semester, please nominate by 09 August. Contact the DRD for internal closing date.

N.B. Upon submission of your nomination, please check with the DRD if they have received it as often, instead of submitting grant-holders save their nominations. Please nominate all foreign students first as they are funded from a quota (not applicable to postdocs)

2.7. Commitment students (students or staff already supported on the grant)

Funds are automatically reserved for these students but they still need to be nominated on the NRF system to ensure continual support. This also applies to those grants that have reached the end of their funding period.

2.8. Receipt of bursary funds

There are a lot of processes involved here. If all is in order, the submitted nomination is validated by the DA and submitted to the NRF for consideration. How long it takes for the NRF to approve the nomination depends on the NRF. The university claims the funds once approved and released by the NRF. When the NRF has paid the funds into SU's account, the FO makes a transfer to relevant departments (e.g. Postgraduate office, Postdoc office, etc.). Only then can bursaries be paid out to students accounts by the Postgraduate Office. It is most important to note that processing of nominations by the NRF can be quite lengthy and not all nominations are approved and paid at the same time. Also important to note is that the NRF makes payments to SU according to a time schedule, hence funds are not paid out immediately.

2.9. Other bursaries concurrently with NRF

Please refer to the call document, agreement for grant holder-linked student support and bursary conditions for regulations. For more information, please contact the Postgraduate Office.

2.10. Supplementation

Please refer to bursary conditions for the correct information. Also see the NRF FAQs document attached.

2.11.   De-registration of bursary holder

The grant-holder needs to notify the DRD as soon as possible should a student decide to de-register for whatever reason. The total amount received from the NRF will be refundable to the NRF by the individual concerned. The university repays the bursary to the NRF and the student becomes a debtor to the university. The student is advised to liaise with the university finance department or student fees with regards to the payment process of the debt on their student account.