RESEARCH CAREER ADVANCEMENT FELLOWSHIPS

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Directorate: Human and Infrastructure Capacity Development
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1. **Background and Rationale**

The subject of career pathing for emerging researchers and in particular postdoctoral researchers has been receiving a great degree of attention over the past decade. In most developed economies, and in some emerging economy countries, the attention is in response to reduced academic employment opportunities for postdoctoral fellows as an outcome of the rise in numbers of PhD’s and postdocs without the corresponding rise in the number of available academic positions.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has made available funding for Research Career Advancement Fellowships in order to strengthen research capacity and scientific research leadership in Science, Engineering and Technology. This will be done by creating positions for senior postdoctoral fellows who have shown interest in furthering careers in research and academia and have demonstrated the potential and ability for research leadership.

2. **Objectives**

The objectives of the Research Career Advancement Fellowship are to:

- Provide career a career path for postdoctoral researchers to pursue a career in research;
- Create the opportunity for these emerging researchers to be mentored and groomed for research leadership and academic positions;
- Create an opportunity for senior postdoctoral researchers to strengthen their research track record in their chosen research area and to establish themselves as independent researchers;
- Create an opportunity for emerging researchers to gain experience in post-graduate training;
- Effect transformation in the demographic composition of established researchers in South Africa, with respect to race, gender and persons with disabilities; and
• Develop a cohort of potential candidates for the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI).

3. **Principles for the awarding of the Fellowships**

• The Research Career Advancement Fellowships are aimed at providing support for the training of individuals for research leadership in all areas of Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematical Sciences (STEM) at public universities.

• The Fellowship may be held in partnership with a public research institution such as a science council, a national research facility or an academic health complex.

• The Fellowships are not pre-allocated to institutions. Individual candidates must submit applications to the NRF. These applications must bear the endorsement of the university Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) for research, or equivalent, at the university.

• There will be no restriction on the number of Research Career Advancement Fellowships that may be awarded to a single institution.

• Applications where hosts institutions can provide intentions to absorb such candidates into their work force after completion of the fellowship will be at an advantage.

• Fellows must undertake research that is in line with national and university research priorities.

• Preference will be given to those fellows who have obtained postdoctoral research experience outside the university where the Doctoral degree was granted.

• A strong motivation, endorsed by the host institution, must be provided by those fellows who would like to remain within the same institution and/department where the current postdoctoral research is currently undertaken.

• Fellows are expected to dedicate at least 80% of their time conducting research, supervising and mentoring postgraduate students.

• Successful candidates will be considered for receiving support whilst conducting full-time research for a period of five years.
4. **Eligibility**

Applicants must:
- Be South African citizens or in possession of South African permanent residency
- Have obtained a research doctorate;
- Have a minimum of two years of post-doctoral research experience;
- Have demonstrated research outputs emanating from their doctoral and post-doctoral research activities. These include articles published in peer reviewed journals;

Apply for the Research Career Advancement Fellowship within eight (8) years of obtaining a research doctorate, Not be permanent employees of the university at the time of taking-up the award.

5. **Institutional Requirements**

Research Career Advancement Fellowships may be awarded in any academic discipline within the priority research areas for South Africa. This includes all fields of STEM, including the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). Fellows must be appointed by the university at the level of lecturer, senior lecturer or researcher commensurate with experience and outputs. Applications must include the support of a senior host researcher that will provide space, infrastructure and mentorship for the Fellow.

Applications must include the support of the DVC Research committing to:
- Appoint the candidate as a staff member;
- Provide a salary top-up where applicable;
- Ensure effective management of the fellowship programme.
- Institutions with more than four (4) fellows are required to retain/would have retained at least 25% of the fellows as staff members by the end of the five year RCAF term, either through a further five-year contract or permanent employment. Should the institution not be able to meet this requirement, then the funds that were made available to the institution should be returned to the NRF on a pro rata basis depending on the percentage of fellows employed.
6. Application process

6.1. Call for applications and nominations

The NRF will invite applications to support full-time postdoctoral research fellows who are interested in conducting research in any academic discipline within the priority research areas for South Africa. Applicants will be required to complete an application form, in a format provided by the NRF. All applications for a five-year period must bear the endorsement of the designated authority of the institution, the host researcher and the DVC of the institution in which research is intended to be carried out.

7. Funding

7.1. Funding principle

The establishment of research career advancement fellowships programme is aimed at increasing the pool of active researchers within the national system of innovation. Consideration will be given to ensuring the need to strengthen research capacity in priority skills and knowledge fields. The allocation model will therefore prioritise for building capacity in scarce skills and in areas aligned with the national research and development strategies. Every attempt will be made to allocate funding in order to meet the target of 60% Black and at least 50% women researchers.

In selecting applicants for consideration for funding, the following general criteria will apply:

- An applicant may not concurrently hold funding with another NRF scholarships, postdoctoral fellowships or any other fellowship from a South African government source.
- A fellow may not be in full-time employment for the duration of the Research Career Advancement Fellowship.
- Priority will be given to applicants with access to research infrastructure and mentorship or those linked to existing research groups at higher education institutions, public research institutions, national research facilities and science councils.

Successful applicants will be required to sign conditions of grant with the NRF.
7.2. Value of the fellowship

For the 2015 academic year, the fellowship shall provide for a taxable salary of R350 000 per annum and a grant of up to R100 000 per annum for research and travel expenses. Annually, the salary increase will be aligned with inflation, and will not exceed 5%.

8. Reporting

An Annual Progress Report (APR) must be submitted by the Research Career Advancement Fellow in a format provided by the NRF, documenting progress made against set objectives, research outputs, institutional financial contribution and expenditure of project funding. An annual meeting will be held at the institution to review progress of the research fellow. A mid-term evaluation of the research activities will take place in year three (3) of the fellowship.

The NRF may in consultation with the Fellow’s research office, request interim progress reports for the purpose of implementing corrective measures timeously to ensure that stated objectives are met within stipulated timeframes.

At the end of the five-year funding period, a final report must be submitted demonstrating the outputs and expenditure of the previous years, as well as containing a final assessment of progress made in relation to project objectives.

9. Timelines

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>Call for applications</td>
<td>15 August - 30 September 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional briefing meetings</td>
<td>August - September 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review process</td>
<td>15 October 2014 – 30 November 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awarding</td>
<td>20 December 2014</td>
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