



Infrastructure Bridging Programme
Strategic Platforms Programme
**Directorate: Human and Institutional Capacity
Development**

Framework Document

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Endorsements

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Contents

Endorsements.....	1
Contents	2
Table of Figures.....	2
1. Strategic Context	3
2. Objectives	4
3. Scope.....	4
4. Proposal Requirements	4
5. Modus Operandi	5
6. Financial Control	6

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Process flow diagram for the Infrastructure Bridging Programme.....	6
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1. Strategic Context

The NRF, through a range of funding programmes, supports the acquisition, upgrade and development of research infrastructure at higher education institutions (HEIs), science councils (SCs), museums, and other state funded research institutes (e.g. NECSA). However, several challenges have been encountered during the implementation phase of each of these programmes. Major challenges include the lack of financial resources available to the research institution to support the infrastructural requirements to house the newly procured research equipment; and, the acquisition of additional research equipment to support the current research infrastructure.

Other challenges include:

1. The increased frequency of unscheduled power outages has undoubtedly resulted in the malfunctioning and breakage of some of the components of the equipment, which is both costly and deprives the research community of access time.
2. The equipment is custom made to the grantholder's research requirements and hence has a long lead-time before equipment is fully installed and commissioned.
3. The financial burden placed on the research institute to contribute to a third of the funding requirements towards the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment.

In light of the aforementioned challenges, the NRF is implementing a new funding instrument in the form of the Infrastructure Bridging Programme.

The Infrastructure Bridging Programme makes available, in the form of a grant, non interest-bearing bridging finance to a maximum value of R 5 million per research institution, to support the physical infrastructural requirements needed to support either the acquisition or upgrade to state-of-the art equipment or platform research projects in strategic areas such as nanotechnology.

The rationale behind the Infrastructure Bridging Programme is to make available NRF funds to support the larger science community in terms of infrastructure required to extend the boundaries of science, engineering and technology in South Africa. This financial risk will therefore need to be guaranteed by the research institution in terms of the full repayment of the bridging finance within the stipulated 12-month time frame.

2. Objectives

The objectives are to:

1. Support the establishment of suitable infrastructure needed for large pieces of research equipment funded through other NRF mechanisms;
2. Prevent the delay in the deployment of research equipment due to infrastructural constraints that arise from a shortage of cash; and
3. Support the acquisition of research equipment to enhance the research infrastructure capacity at the institution.

3. Scope

Proposals for the Infrastructure Bridging Programme shall be submitted to the NRF by the Research Office of the Institution and must be signed by the Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research (or equivalent) in order to be considered for support. The proposals may include the upgrade and refurbishments of existing research facilities and/or laboratories to support either the housing of the equipment applied for in the NNEP and NEP; and the acquisition of additional research equipment to support the current research infrastructure.

They may also include the acquisition of advanced computer workstations necessary for the promotion of world-class research. Laptops for routine office work, travel grants for user-training workshops and other human capacity development related initiatives may not be included.

The non interest-bearing bridging grant, however, is repayable, in full, to the NRF on 25 March of the year immediately after bridging finance was made available to the research institution.

If, however, the research institution is unable to pay back the full value of the bridging grant within the stipulated timeframe, then (i) the research institution will be disqualified from further participation in this Programme; and (ii) the total outstanding amount will be recovered either from future grants awarded to the institution or the grant deposit made to the institution.

4. Proposal Requirements

For the proposal to be considered, it should have the following information:

- Description and justification for the proposed research infrastructure;
- Feasibility of the construction of the proposed infrastructure;
- Impact of the research infrastructure on the following issues:
 - How the research infrastructure supports the acquisition and/or upgrade to state-of-the-art equipment procured from the NRF suite of infrastructure grants?
 - How the research infrastructure meets national and institutional research goals?
 - How the research infrastructure will assist the institution in building research capacity?

- How the research infrastructure will be utilised to train students at postgraduate level and in particular disabled, black and female students?
- A work plan that includes discussion on the following points:
 - Maintenance and operation of the research infrastructure, including the necessary technical expertise for these tasks.
 - Impact of the research infrastructure on research initiatives across research fields at the research institution.
 - Impact of the research infrastructure on other equipment, placed at different departments at the research institution.
 - Identified and committed sources for loan repayment.
 - Willingness to participate in a full NRF audit.

5. Modus Operandi

A total budget amounting to R50 million will be made available to support the development of infrastructure associated with the purchase and installation of state-of-the-art research equipment through the Infrastructure Bridging Programme.

The bridging grant will accrue zero interest and minimal administrative costs and repayment is due no later than 25 March of the following calendar year.

The grant management process to be used within the Infrastructure Bridging Programme is described by the process flow diagram shown in **Figure 1**.

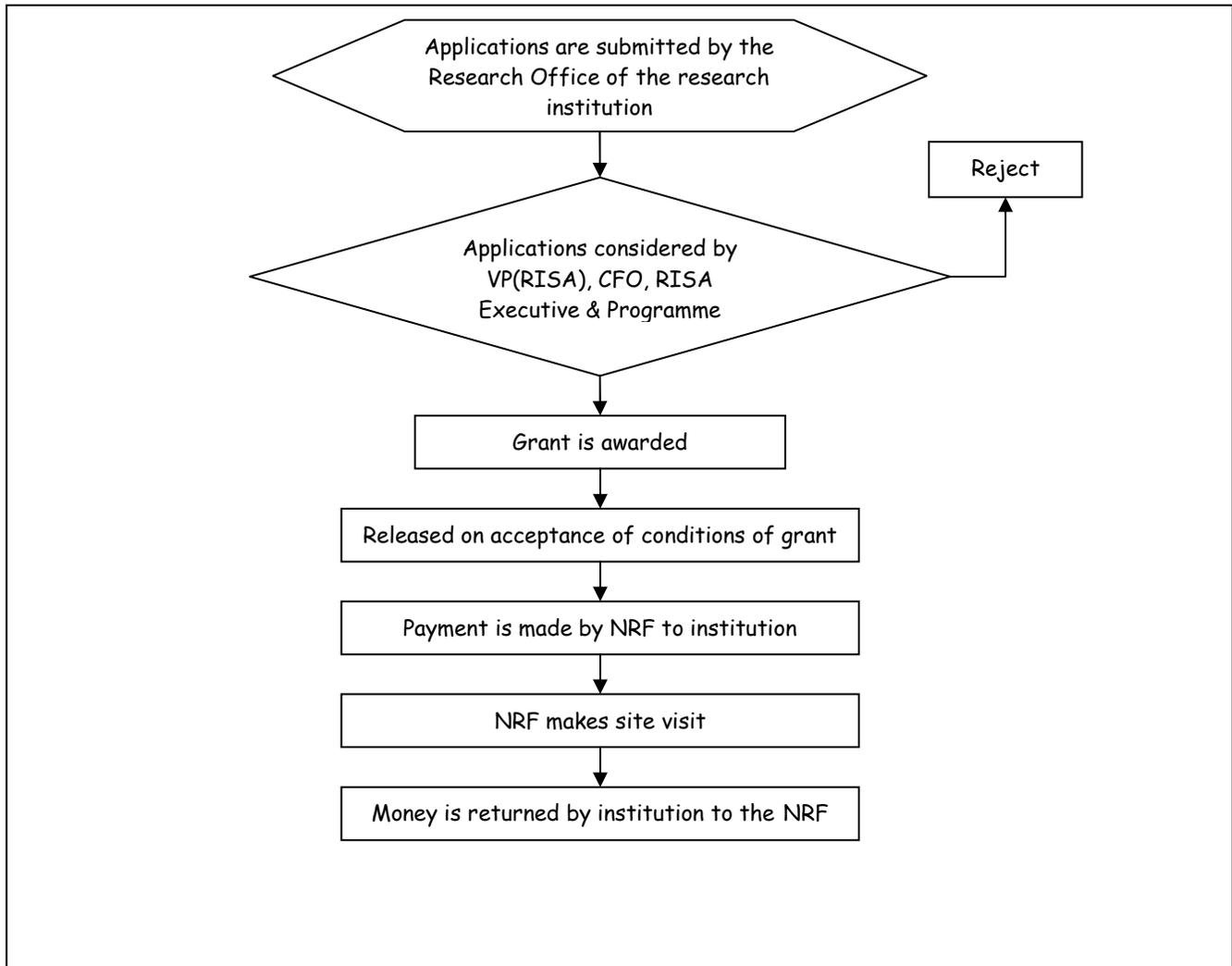


Figure 1: Process flow diagram for the Infrastructure Bridging Programme

6. Financial Control

The Infrastructure Bridging Programme will only be made available to South African Universities, Science Councils, museums and other state-funded research institutes (e.g. NECSA). Furthermore, the conditions of grant will apply strictly, including the stipulated date of the full payment of the funds back to the NRF. Failure to do so will disqualify the institutions from participating in the Programme again; and the total outstanding amount will be recovered either from future grants awarded to the institution or the grant deposit made to the institution.

Such bridging grants will not exceed R5 million or the value of the grant deposit, which is provided by the NRF to the research institution in the normal course of business.

The NRF will undertake at least one site visit to inspect progress of deliverables and milestones as indicated in the proposal submitted by the research institution to the NRF.

As these awards effectively place a financial risk on the institution, the conditions of grant will need to be signed off by the following parties representing the institution:

1. Research Management: Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (or equivalent)
 2. Research Institute: Chief Financial Officer
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