MRC RESEARCH STRENGTHENING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY FOR SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)

Request for Applications (RFA)

[For SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY (SMU)]

MRC-RFA-CC 01- 2015/SMU

14 July 2015
### Part A. Overview Information

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<tr>
<th>Participating Organization(s)</th>
<th>South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Opportunity Title</td>
<td>SAMRC RESEARCH STRENGTHENING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITY FOR SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity Code</td>
<td>Grant: Developmental</td>
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<td>Announcement Type</td>
<td>New</td>
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<td>Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) Number</td>
<td>MRC-RFA-CC -01-2015/SMU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Opportunity Purpose</td>
<td>The purpose of this Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) is research strengthening and capacity development for selected SA universities</td>
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### Key Dates

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<td>Open Date (Earliest Submission Date)</td>
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<td>Letter of Intent</td>
<td>None required</td>
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<td>Application Due Date(s)</td>
<td>Monday 24 August 2015, by 5:00 PM SAST. Applicants are encouraged to apply early.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scientific Merit Review Closes</td>
<td>19 Sept 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award Decision letter</td>
<td>By October 2015</td>
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Application Instructions

It is critical that applicants follow the instructions in this FOA. Conformance to all requirements is required and strictly enforced. Applicants must read and follow all application instructions. Applications that do not comply with these instructions may be delayed or not accepted for review.

Part B. Full Text of Announcement

1. Funding Opportunity Description

1.1 Background

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), in driving biomedical research and aiming to build a healthy nation through research, supports national collaborative biomedical research to advance science and expand biomedical knowledge. Recognizing that enhanced national collaborative multidisciplinary biomedical research must in the future include ALL South African academic institutions and not be limited to previously advantaged and established universities, the President of the SAMRC aims to strengthen research initiatives and develop enhanced research capacity at historically disadvantaged institutions. It is envisioned that through this research strengthening and capacity building funding opportunity, these institutions would be capacitated to conduct excellent multidisciplinary research to address some of the key questions that could impact on lowering the burden of disease in South Africa.

1.2. Purpose

This announcement invites application(s) from the eligible institution (SMU) in clinical, biomedical, behavioral, basic, applied and/or translational science to submit individual or collaborative research proposals. The intent of this FOA is to build South Africa’s national research efforts by capacitating previously disadvantaged institutions to compete in the competitive SA and global research funding arena. The vision of this initiative is to build and enhance research capacity in order to foster, stimulate, and/or expand basic, translational, behavioral and applied research that will advance scientific discovery and engage South African researchers working collaboratively in these areas of greatest need. It is envisioned that implementation of either group/collaborative/independent investigator driven research, designed to address South Africa’s highest priority health-related problems identified as the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the country (as shown is the Table below) will ensure that regional or nationally relevant research questions are addressed while simultaneously increasing the capacity for the institution to contribute significantly to the country’s relevant research outputs.
Proposed research projects from SMU should reflect the highest possible scientific standards, as well as national and local public health needs and priorities, and involve mutually advantageous collaborations within the institution, and may include participating communities and in-kind participations of investigators from institutions not listed in this call but participating in research strengthening and capacity development activities.

South African investigators from SMU; working independently or collaboratively are expected to submit a single application. This FOA encourages applications that include under-resourced sites and/or sites that have access to key populations that are most affected and/or most vulnerable.

2. Award Information

SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY (SMU), the eligible university is invited to submit a single application. This is a non-competitive funding opportunity i.e. the university named in this call will be awarded the funds. It is expected that the institution will set-up an appropriate selection process in order to identify the best and most appropriate groups or individuals within the institution to respond to this call.

The selected proposal should encompass one or more of the following disciplines: clinical science, biomedical, socio-behavioral science, epidemiology and public health and/or computational and...
imaging science. Expertise may also include research in basic and discovery science, and translational science and surveillance. The selected proposal must include one or more investigators from the institution.

Eligible applicants who need assistance in identifying a collaborator or refining their proposal may email their requirements to thabi.maitin@mrc.ac.za at SAMRC. Should a proposal be deemed in need of revision, either in scope or content, this process will be managed by the programme officer. A mentor(s) or collaborator(s) will be identified and assigned. Successful applicants, on approval of a final proposal, will receive a core grant for up to five years, depending on adequate progress as initially detailed on plan.

The investigators may be required to attend meetings/workshops to enhance coordination and collaboration.

Investigators will be required to provide revisions of the proposal until a final proposal is deemed fundable by a scientific review committee. Further, the investigators will be expected to prepare publications emanating from studies which include SAMRC support.

3. Eligibility Information

Only the following institution is eligible to apply:

SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY (SMU)

FURTHER

- Individuals or groups from the above institution may apply
- Principal Investigators must be South African citizens or permanent residence holders.

The application must clearly state whether an individual or group is applying.

Eligibility of the applicant: the application should be led by a well-established professor or senior lecturer at SMU, who is expected to have a MBCHB and/or PhD. Further, (s)he must demonstrate scientific leadership skills and an ability to conduct the described research. All applicants
must demonstrate documented proof of previous scientific contributions in the disease(s) or scientific focus area being applied for. Their publications must be provided in a table in the application.

**Number of co-applicants**: since this may be a group application, all investigators must be listed and described, including their envisaged contribution to the research. Note that applicants are encouraged to include non-funded senior investigators from other institutions including the SAMRC in an advisory or mentorship capacity. Their respective roles and responsibilities must be outlined.

**Inclusion of under-resourced sites/ targeted relevant study populations**: Applicants are encouraged to include in their application development of an under-resourced site/new study population and identified high disease incidence populations that have been previously under-researched or resourced. Applicants are encouraged to capitalize on their unique location/setting/access to populations to address locally relevant research questions.

**Number of Applications**: The institution may submit (1) application. Each application may be inclusive of a maximum of 5 independent projects spanning a minimum duration of 2 years and a maximum duration of 5 years.

### 4. Application Schedule

The timelines for the application process are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Application timelines**

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5. Funding

The SAMRC plans to fund the named institution (SMU) provided that they submit an application that is deemed eligible and successful by a scientific review committee. The institution will be given five years of core funding in the initial funding cycle. Funds may be used to build research capacity and networking at the institution and would be inclusive of infra-structure; site-development; capacity development; preliminary studies; networking and travel costs.

A successful application will be awarded R1 000 000 (one million rand) per annum; annually renewable for a maximum of 5 years subject to agreed milestones being met.

6. Support and Mentorship

The institution (SMU) is encouraged to enlist the support of other research organizations, universities or research councils.

7. Application Guidelines

All applications must be submitted using the Application Form available on the SAMRC website or obtainable from the office of the SAMRC President telephone: (021) 938 0631.

The length of the application should not exceed 30 pages – provide single spaced pages, using Arial 11 font. The Application must address the following areas:

- Detailed description of the scientific contributions made by the applying individual(s) /group to date in the described research area. Provide a detailed track record of the publications and policy/practice impact of the research.
- Description of Principal Investigator’s (PI) scientific standing. (Include a table of his/her 20 most cited journal articles). If more than one PI is listed this information should be provided in detail for each investigator.
- Describe the Principal Investigator’s leadership and administrative capabilities that will serve to manage the grant successfully.
- Describe ALL senior scientists (at least 3) that are listed and their scientific contributions to date.
- Describe access to infrastructure, laboratory resources, patient populations, databases, biobanks and other unique technologies.
o Describe in detail support of capacity development by enlisting masters and doctoral students as well as internship and other mentorship activities.

o Describe ALL projects /studies (up to 5 pages per project/study) that the institution is proposing to the SAMRC.

o Describe the project (s) in detail; include the following information: (i) Rationale for proposed research (ii) Aim and objectives (iii) Methods including statistical consideration (iv) Ethical consideration.

o Describe in detail the project management including data access and management; financial management; management of project related activities. Templates will be provided to facilitate complete reporting.

o Include a detailed budget in the application.

o Provide a detailed description of key deliverables that may be achieved with this funding opportunity.

8. Conditions of the Grant

Successful applicants will be required to incorporate the SAMRC logo on the letterheads and power-point presentations. All publications will be required to acknowledge the SAMRC as well as report outputs to the SAMRC. It is expected that the applicant(s) and investigator (s) will participate in SAMRC organized meetings and networking activities as required. The institution will enter into an agreement with the SAMRC which will set out all of the conditions of the award.

9. Application Process

The call for applications will open on 14 July 2015 and close on 24 August 2015. The application must be made on “MRC Application” Form obtainable from the SAMRC website.

9. Review and Evaluation Process

There will be a three-step review and evaluation process as follows:

- Internal SAMRC screening for responsiveness to all the specified administrative and procedural requirements in the RFA;

- National and / or International scientific peer-review to assess the scientific merit (and other review criteria as specified below) of applications found to be responsive to the RFA.
• Reiterative third-step (can run concurrent with step 2 above): proposal revision supported by SAMRC appointed mentor and/or collaborator and the designated programme officer.

9.1 Internal screening
The application will be screened by the SAMRC for completeness and responsiveness to administrative requirements/provisions. If the application is found to be incomplete or unresponsive to the provisions described in the RFA, the application may be rejected or will be returned for revision and resubmission.

9.2 Peer-review of qualifying applications
A responsive application will be reviewed by local and/or international reviewers who are experts in the field and form a scientific review committee. Reviewers will consider each of the review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each. Reviewers will also provide an overall impact score.

Overall Impact Score: This will reflect on the likelihood for the research to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research fields involved; in consideration of the 5 criteria below.

Significance. Will the research address important problems or critical barrier to progress? Will the research make a significant scientific contribution? Will the research generate new scientific knowledge, enhance South Africa’s technical capabilities in research, impact on public health policy and influence clinical practice? Will the research lead to changes in the field, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or prevention of the disease?

Investigator(s). Do the lead investigators have meritorious and/or international scientific standing including publication and citations? Are the listed senior scientists well qualified and productive? Have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? Has this group of scientists (lead investigator plus senior scientists) demonstrated a productive track record of collaboration with each other?

Capacity Development: Does the application address capacity development and support of new investigators? Does the application support the scientific development of at least one junior and mid-level and senior scientist by a masters; doctoral or post-doctoral studies, internships or secondments to learn techniques/methods?

Innovation. Are the proposed projects innovative? Do the proposed studies challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel approaches?

Environment. Will the scientific environment in the university contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators
adequate? Does the institution have access to important patient populations, existing research programmes or biobanks that could enhance the SAMRC Network’s research agenda? Have the researchers described a collaboration and mentorship plan?

9.3 Finalization of application and mentorship

The review comments will be collated for each application and provided to an SAMRC programme officer for feedback to the applicant and guided revision of the application in consultation with a mentor, where required.

10. Grant Payments

Grants will be paid to the institution. The disbursement of funds will be according to the disbursement schedule agreed to by the SAMRC and the institution and will be set out in the agreement between the parties.

11. Responsibilities of the Lead Investigator

11.1 Reporting

The funded institution must submit bi-annual reports from the year of receipt of the grant. Reports must be completed on an MRC template to be provided.

11.2 Scientific compliance

11.2.1 Ethics

Maintenance of the highest ethical and safety standards in conducting research, particularly when human and animal subjects are involved must be evident. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator of each project to comply with all relevant regulations in this regard, including those of the institution(s) at which the research is carried out. An ethics approval certificate from a National Health Research Ethics Committee or an approved Institutional Ethics Committee must be submitted to the SAMRC in respect of successful applications before full funding can be released.

11.2.2 Intellectual Property Rights

Funding by the SAMRC is subject to the provisions of the SAMRC Intellectual Property Policy as well as the Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development Act 51 of 2008.

11.2.3 Change of leadership/Investigator(s)

In the event of the PI/investigators leaving the institution for whatever reason, the SAMRC must be informed (where possible, prior to the departure of the investigator from the institution), of proposed alternate arrangements for the continued management and leadership of the project(s), with complete documentation that demonstrates the qualifications of the alternate leadership. After reviewing the proposed change, the SAMRC may decide to terminate the award if there is a
determination of insufficient continuing expertise to lead the research to a successful conclusion. If the new investigator is approved by the MRC, she/he will be required to sign a revised “Acceptance of Conditions of Grant Award” and submit a CV and attend Research Forum/Network meetings.

12. Important Information
Please take note the following important information:

i. The SAMRC will utilise the results of the peer review to determine which meritorious application/project within the application receive funding. The SAMRC may also consider additional factors such as institutional research priorities, inclusion of vulnerable populations and resourcing of sites in making its final determinations;

ii. Based on the scientific merit of the application and/or budget limitations, the SAMRC may award a value deemed appropriate that may be less than set out above; the SAMRC may seek to verify any information provided by applicant through independent research or by third parties approved by the MRC;

iii. The institution may submit only 1 application. This may include a maximum of 5 independent projects led by a PI. Each project proposal must list all investigators.

iv. The SAMRC may use text, video or other visual representation submitted by researchers involved in the application on the SAMRC website or on SAMRC materials for publicity and/or public awareness;

v. The SAMRC will provide written summaries of the review findings. Note that reviewers’ names will not be shared with the applicants.

13. Contact Details
Please submit your applications to:

Applications: philistia.joshua@mrc.ac.za

Please direct your requests for information and questions by email to

Queries: thabi.maitin@mrc.ac.za

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