



## **GRANTS, INNOVATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

**Request for Applications (RFA):**

**Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)**

**SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-02-2024**

**Release Date: 12 February 2024**

**Closing Date: 12 April 2024**

## **1. Introduction**

The mission of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) is to improve the nation's health and quality of life by conducting and funding relevant and responsive health research, development, innovation, and research translation. The SAMRC is the largest local funder of health research in Southern Africa and supports high quality research, innovation, and capacity development through a variety of grant programmes and strategic partnerships.

The United Kingdom's Medical Research Council (UKMRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, improves the health of people in the UK – and around the world – by supporting excellent science, and training the very best scientists.

The SAMRC is pleased to announce an open call for proposals as part of a collaboration with the UKMRC under the umbrella of the UK's International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF). This joint research programme aims to promote collaboration between researchers based in South Africa, other African countries and the UK. The call focuses on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) of high prevalence in Africa as well as mental health.

## **2. Funding Opportunity Description**

### **2.1. RFA Priority Areas**

This call seeks proposals that focus on NCDs such as cancer, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, cardiovascular and chronic lung diseases, and chronic liver disease (non-infectious aetiology), as well as mental health. NCDs are the most common cause of death globally and there is a clear need for novel, innovative research which increases our understanding of, and provides new tools to address, these conditions for the benefit of the people of South Africa and populations across the African continent, as well as other low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Research to be supported through this RFA may include translational research, laboratory-based research, hypothesis-driven and hypothesis-generating clinical research, as well as prevention and population health research, with the long-term objective of improving scientific understanding of the unique attributes of NCDs in African populations. This research should further improve our understanding of disease mechanisms, presentation and progression and inform innovative prevention and treatment strategies that are likely to be efficacious, cost-effective, affordable, potentially sustainable, and acceptable to the key stakeholders in Africa. Proposals that incorporate genomics and that are applicable to maternal, neonatal and child health in relation to NCDs are also encouraged.

Applications should target people at risk and vulnerable populations, address modifiable, metabolic and environmental risk factors, and have socioeconomic impact, ideally focusing on early detection, prevention and control. Ultimately, the proposed research should contribute to reducing NCD-related mortality and morbidity in Africa and other LMICs.

### **2.2. Additional Requirements**

This call seeks to strengthen research capacity both of individuals and of institutions within South Africa, Africa, and the UK. All applicants are required to include plans to strengthen research capacity within their application, including training/mentoring of the next generation of

researchers, with a focus on those from previously disadvantaged ethnic groups and institutions. In addition, it is expected that applicants will engage appropriate stakeholders as they develop their proposals – this may include policymakers, ministry officials, non-governmental organisation leaders and community leaders relevant to the populations benefitting from the research – and develop a community engagement plan, leveraging bidirectional learning and ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion.

This call further seeks to support collaboration between researchers in South Africa and the UK and encourages the inclusion of scientists from other African countries as well as researchers from historically disadvantaged/resource-poor institutions (HDIs) in South Africa. Principal investigators (PIs) funded under this call must be based in South Africa and must have a research collaborator in the UK that meets the eligibility criteria for funding as a co-investigator.

To facilitate collaboration, a webinar will be held in February 2024 (date to be communicated) that will provide an opportunity for researchers to explore and discuss potential topics for collaboration. It is strongly encouraged that applicants formulate their intended research questions before this webinar to ensure meaningful discussions and enable the identification of potential collaborators.

Proposals may be up to 3 years in duration with a budget limit of R14 million per project. The funders expect to make up to 5 awards with a maximum duration of 3 years each through this call for proposals.

### **2.3. Eligibility**

This is an open call for proposals from researchers based at South African public universities and science councils and other public research organisations. PIs must also be South African citizens or permanent residence holders. Proposals must include at least one co-investigator based at a UK research organisation. Additional co-investigators from publicly-funded universities and research institutions in other African countries may also be included. While there is no limit to the number of applications submitted per organisation, PIs may only submit one application each as the PI but may be involved in more than one application if listed as a co-investigator. **Only one application is allowed per PI across the three published ISPF calls (SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-02-2024; SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-03-2024 and SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-04-2024).** Applications that are proposing work on behalf of commercial entities will not be considered.

This programme is highly competitive and has limited funds available. The primary consideration in determining the success of a funding application will be the quality of the research proposal. However, equally important to the SAMRC is transformation and building the capacity of, particularly, early-career, black and women scientists as well as resource-limited institutions. Thus, proposals that are from PIs or institutions meeting these criteria and/or that involve a component of capacity building of or partnership with such individuals and/or institutions may be given preference.

### **3. Application Process and Timeline**

It is critical that applicants follow the instructions in this RFA. **Applications will not be processed further or considered for funding if they:**

- Are deemed non-responsive to the specific topics included in this RFA;

- Are received after the deadline for submission;
- Are incomplete, i.e., do not have **all** sections of the proposal and budget templates completed and all requested supporting documents attached; and/or
- Are from non-eligible organisations.

All applications must be submitted using the SAMRC Proposal and Budget templates available on the SAMRC website. The length of the application should not exceed 20 single-spaced A4 pages, excluding annexures, using Arial 11 font. The submission must include the following:

- The fully completed Proposal Template signed by the relevant authority at the institution and the PI – the proposal may be submitted as a Word document with a separate scanned pdf with signatures or a converted pdf document with signatures
- The fully completed Budget Template in Excel
- CVs of the SA PI, UK PI and any other co-investigators (combined)
- Additional Annex 1: Ethics, Genetic and Biological Risk, and Research Involving Animals, Humans or Biological Samples completed by the UK PI
- Additional Annex 2: Official Development Assistance (ODA): Compliance Eligibility Statement completed by the UK PI
- Additional Annex 3: Gender Equality Statement completed by the UK PI

For guidance on sex in experimental design, please refer to [sex in experimental design](#).

All applications and supporting documents must be submitted through the SAMRC Application Portal: [ISPF Calls](#)

The full set of application documents must be submitted by **17:00 South African time on 12 April 2024**. Any applications received after this date and time will not be accepted.

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

**Table 1: Application timelines**

<b>RFA Release Date</b>	<b>12 February 2024</b>
<b>Webinar</b>	<b>February 2024 (date to be confirmed)</b>
<b>Application Due Date</b>	<b>12 April 2024</b>
<b>Peer Review of Applications</b>	<b>May-July 2024</b>
<b>Internal Approvals</b>	<b>August-September 2024</b>
<b>Notification of Awards</b>	<b>October 2024</b>

For more information on the SAMRC's General Terms and Conditions of Funding, including allowable and non-allowable costs, please go to [Funding at the SAMRC | SAMRC](#)

#### **4. Review and Evaluation of Proposals**

There will be a two-step review and evaluation process:

1. Internal SAMRC screening for responsiveness to all the specified administrative and procedural provisions required in the RFA.
2. National and international peer review to assess the scientific merit (and other review criteria

as specified below) of applications found to be responsive to the RFA.

#### 4.1. Internal screening

All applications will be screened by the SAMRC for completeness and responsiveness to the RFA and its administrative requirements/provisions. If the application is found to be incomplete or unresponsive to the provisions and priority areas described in the RFA, or was submitted after the deadline, the application will not be processed further.

#### 4.1. Peer review

Each responsive and complete application received by the due date will be reviewed by local and international reviewers, taking into account at least the following criteria:

**Scientific Significance/Relevance/Impact** – relevance of the proposed research to the RFA topic areas; potential of the research to improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in the field; potential of the research to lead to positive health, economic or societal impacts in South Africa or Africa; likelihood that the research will advance basic biomedical concepts, unmet needs in human health, address the social, economic, environmental (especially climate change and air pollution) and commercial determinants of health, improve or enhance the healthcare system of South Africa, or contribute to healthcare policy or towards the development of important new products such as medicines, devices, or therapies; whether the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilising novel theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions; the extent to which the results of the project will contribute to health advancements or to solving barriers to progress in the field.

**Approach** – level of innovation of the approach; technology risks; whether the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses are well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project; the extent to which the research builds on existing research, data, expertise, cohorts, etc.

**Investigator(s)** – size and reach of the team (single institution/PI versus multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary); experience and record of the PI, co-investigator(s), collaborators, and other researchers; availability of all necessary expertise to complete the work.

**Environment** – availability of appropriate and necessary infrastructure, support, equipment, and other physical resources; unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements.

**Capacity Development and Collaboration** – presence of a clear plan for capacity development; potential of the project to develop the research capacity of early career, black and women researchers and/or resource-limited institutions; merits of the international (SA-UK and SA-other African country) collaborations, including complementarity and synergy between the PI and co-investigators and the extent to which the research is enhanced by the collaboration(s).

## 5. Selection of Awardees

The award of grants emanating from this call will be determined by the SAMRC and the UKMRC, taking into account the recommendations of the peer reviewers. The SAMRC may also consider additional factors, such as institutional diversity and transformation in making its final determinations. Based on the merit of the applications and/or budget limitations, the SAMRC may award fewer or more grants than expected and may elect not to allocate all of the available funds to awards from this RFA.

## 6. Important Information

- The SAMRC may seek to verify any information provided by applicants through independent research or by third parties approved by the SAMRC.
- The SAMRC assumes no responsibility for costs incurred in responding to this RFA or any further invitations or communications.
- The SAMRC reserves the right to amend or withdraw the RFA at any time and/or to make no awards.
- Successful awards may be subject to addressing reviewer comments and/or negotiation of project plans and budget.
- Grants will be paid to the institution/organisation where the PI is employed, as set out in a funding agreement to be concluded between the parties.
- The SAMRC reserves the right to withhold grant funds until proof of the necessary ethics and regulatory approvals for the project have been provided to the SAMRC. Should the investigators fail to obtain the necessary approvals within a reasonable time period, the SAMRC reserves the right to withdraw the award.
- The SAMRC may use text, video or other visual representation submitted by successful applicants on the SAMRC website or on SAMRC materials for publicity and/or public awareness.

## 7. Compliance with POPIA

As of the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2021, the new Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) came into full effect. The law is designed to protect how all juristic persons use, store and process data. You can read the full details on the act here: <https://popia.co.za/>

The SAMRC as a responsible statutory science council complies with POPIA. The SAMRC will receive personal information through the research proposals/applications submitted to the SAMRC in response to this RFA. The personal information requested on the proposal template is necessary for the SAMRC to fully evaluate the proposal for funding. This information will be shared with external reviewers, members of the relevant grant selection committee, where applicable, as well as the SAMRC management for the purposes of processing the project proposals. The SAMRC will process this personal information strictly in accordance with POPIA. The SAMRC undertakes specifically to process the personal information on the basis that (a) it was provided voluntarily and (b) the information will be processed only as far may be necessary and within the limitation and ambit of the purpose of evaluating the research proposal/application for funding (*i.e., the purpose with which the personal information was received*). The SAMRC confirms that it is lawfully

processing the information since the purpose of processing is to seek quality research proposals for funding which the SAMRC is mandated to do in terms of Section 4 of the SAMRC Act 58 of 1991, thus the SAMRC is fulfilling its legislated and lawful mandate, and strategic objectives as provided for in the SAMRC Act.

**By submitting your project proposal to the SAMRC you acknowledge and agree to the use of your personal information as outlined above. Should you not approve of such use of your personal information then please refrain from submitting an application.**

## **8. Contact Details**

Please direct any requests for information and questions/queries on this RFA **by email to** [GIPD.ISPF@mrc.ac.za](mailto:GIPD.ISPF@mrc.ac.za)