



## **SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL**

### **Request for Applications (RFA):**

**HDI Capacity Development Grants for Investigator-Initiated Research  
HIV Implementation Science in the Clinical Setting**

**SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-01-2024**

**Release Date: 3 January 2024**

**Closing Date: 9 February 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 programs and strategic partnerships.

The SAMRC is pleased to announce a pilot program in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in the USA to build research capacity and facilitate international collaboration in historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) in South Africa through investigator-initiated projects focusing on HIV implementation science in the clinical setting.

## 2. Funding Opportunity Description

### 2.1 RFA Priority Area

According to the UNAIDS Global HIV statistics Fact Sheet, there were around 39 million people globally living with HIV (PLWH) in 2022, with 1.3 million people becoming newly infected and 630 000 people dying from AIDS-related illnesses in that year. In sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls and young women accounted for more than 77% of new infections among young people aged 15-24 years in 2022 and this group were more than three times as likely to acquire HIV than their male peers in 2022. The HSRC's Sixth South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, and Behaviour survey estimates that there were approximately 7.8 million PLWH in South Africa in 2022. The 2022 survey shows that South Africa has made significant progress toward the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets - 90% of PLWH aged 15 years and older were aware of their status, 91% of those aware of their status were on ART, and 94% of those on ART were virally suppressed. However, the survey also shows gaps that remain in addressing the HIV epidemic in South Africa and that the impact of the epidemic is unequal across geographic regions and populations, particularly affecting black Africans, women, and young people.

Implementation science offers an opportunity to improve HIV management by researching methods to promote the integration of research findings and evidence-based interventions into healthcare policy and practice and, hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services and care for PLWH (Eccles MP, Mittman BS. *Implementation Science*. 2006;1:1). This is particularly important in remote settings where HIV care is sub-optimal. In this pilot program with JHU, the SAMRC is seeking to fund small, collaborative projects on **HIV implementation science in the clinical setting**.

This request for applications is specifically focused on building health research capacity at historically disadvantaged institutions through funding principal investigators at HDIs and pairing them with collaborators at JHU with the purpose of facilitating international collaboration and mentoring. The SAMRC will award grants to deserving applicants in the amount of up to R1 million for a maximum period of 18 months. These funds are intended to support research expenses, including personnel costs where applicable, and limited travel to enable international collaboration. Budget requests must be commensurate with the proposed work and timeline. Preference will be given to projects that are collaborative, bring together all the required expertise, and include a collaborator or mentor from JHU. Projects will be prioritized for funding based on scientific merit and potential to impact on the epidemic.

To facilitate collaboration, a webinar will be held in mid-January (date to be communicated) that will provide an opportunity for researchers at HDIs and potential collaborators from the National Institutes of Health and Johns Hopkins University 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.

## 1. Eligibility

This is an open call for proposals from researchers based at South African Historically Disadvantaged Institutions, which include for the purposes of this RFA:

- Mangosuthu University of Technology
- Sefako Makgatho Health Science University
- University of Fort Hare
- University of Limpopo
- University of the Western Cape
- University of Venda
- University of Zululand
- Walter Sisulu University

Other publicly funded institutions and science councils in South Africa are not eligible to apply for funding through this RFA but may be included as collaborators.

In addition to the above, principal investigators (PIs) must be South African citizens or permanent residence holders. While there is no limit to the number of applications submitted per organization, PIs may only submit one application each as the principal investigator but may be involved in more than one application if listed as a co-investigator.

## 2. 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 topic 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
- Are from non-eligible organizations

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 15 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 PI and co-PIs

The full set of application documents must be emailed to [GIPD.HDI.RFA@mrc.ac.za](mailto:GIPD.HDI.RFA@mrc.ac.za) by **6 pm SA time on 9 February 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>3 January 2024</b>
<b>Webinar with JHU</b>	<b>Mid-January 2024 (date to be confirmed)</b>
<b>Application Due Date</b>	<b>9 February 2024</b>
<b>Peer Review of Applications</b>	<b>February 2024</b>
<b>Internal Approvals</b>	<b>February 2024</b>
<b>Notification of Awards</b>	<b>March 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](#).

### **3. 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 and economic merit (and other review criteria as specified below) of applications found to be responsive to the RFA.

#### **5.1 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.

#### **5.2 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:

**Significance/ Relevance/ Impact** - How important is the science to improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in the field? Will the research advance basic biomedical concepts, unmet needs in human health, improve or enhance the health care system of South Africa, or contribute to health care policy or towards the development of important new products such as medicines, devices, or therapies? Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions. To what extent will the results of the project 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.

**Investigator(s)** – size and reach of the team (single institution/PI versus multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary); experience and record of the PIs, 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

## 6. Selection of Awardees

The award of grants emanating from this call will be determined by the SAMRC with input from John Hopkins University Center For AIDS Research (JHU-CFAR), 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.

## 7. 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/organization where the principal investigator 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.

## 8. 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 Grant Selection Committee 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.

## 9. Contact Details

Please direct any requests for information and questions/queries on this RFA **by email** as follows:

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