



GRANTS, INNOVATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Request for Applications (RFA):

SAMRC - UKRI MRC Drug Discovery for Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

SAMRC-RFA-GIPD-08-2024

Release Date: 22 October 2024

Closing Date: 13 December 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 (MRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), improves the health of people in the UK – and around the world – by supporting excellent science, and training the very best scientists.

The SAMRC and UKRI MRC are partnering to expand their support for drug discovery to address the global challenge of anti-microbial resistance.

2. Funding Opportunity Description

2.1. RFA Priority Areas

In 2019 the United Kingdom Research and Innovation's Medical Research Council (UKRI MRC) and South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) launched the UK-South Africa Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Drug Discovery (DD) Partnership Hub Initiative to address the growing AMR burden and to accelerate AMR drug discovery in South Africa. The initiative provided funding for a collaborative Antibiotic Accelerator focused on drug discovery for AMR with the aims of:

- supporting large-scale collaborative research in antibacterial drug discovery for pathogens of relevance to human health in South Africa;
- supporting the mobility and exchange of UK and South African researchers to enhance links between researchers in both countries;
- building capacity within antibiotic drug discovery, particularly in the context of historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) in South Africa;
- enhancing existing partnerships and developing new partnerships between the UK and South Africa in the area of antibiotic drug discovery;
- allowing the programme to nucleate a potentially global pre-competitive drug discovery consortium; and
- strengthening the strategic relationship between the UK and South Africa.

Two projects were funded as part of this initiative:

1. Harnessing natural product diversity to combat multi-drug resistance, with principal investigators (PIs) Rosemary Dorrington from Rhodes University and Mathew Upton from the University of Plymouth; and
2. Development of antimicrobial peptides against Gram-negative antibiotic resistant pathogens, with PIs Anabella Gaspar from the University of Pretoria and James Mason from King's College London.

The SAMRC and UKRI MRC now wish to build on the above investments and expand the UK-South Africa Antimicrobial Resistance Drug Discovery Partnership Hub to bring in additional partners and transition promising candidates towards preclinical and clinical development. Proposals are invited for high quality collaborative research partnerships focused on addressing the growing global burden of AMR through drug discovery and translation. Applications must be linked to and/or align with the existing projects in the Partnership Hub as follows:

1. The current Partnership Hub PIs may apply for funding to extend and/or expand their existing projects;
2. New applicants may propose how they will work with the PIs at Rhodes University and the University of Pretoria to advance their promising candidates towards preclinical and clinical development;
3. New applicants may propose projects that expand the existing UK-South Africa Antimicrobial Resistance Drug Discovery Partnership Hub by undertaking drug discovery to address AMR using alternative sources of compounds/antimicrobials and/or novel assays and/or targeting other pathogens of high relevance in the South African setting.

Research that builds on the existing drug discovery pipeline and leads to pre-clinical and clinical development towards commercialisation is within the scope of this call. The contribution of the research to expanding the existing AMR projects and/or contribution to an expanded Antimicrobial Resistance Drug Discovery Partnership Hub must be detailed. All proposals must emphasise why the results generated will be of major importance to addressing the growing burden of AMR in Africa, and how the results would have a practical impact with the potential to provide scalable and sustainable solutions.

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.

In keeping with the original programme, 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.

Proposals may be up to 3 years in duration with a budget limit of R9 million per project. The funders expect to make 2-5 awards with a duration of 1-3 years each through this request for applications.

2.3. Eligibility

Definition of an eligible research institution

For the purposes of the call, a research institution is defined as a legally constituted institution or organisation wherein research is one of the primary purposes for its existence, including the training of postgraduate students. The broad thrust of the organisation's research, basic or applied, should be towards the advancement of knowledge. Research institutions include universities, science councils and other organisations whose core business is conducting

research and/or training postgraduate students.

Individual eligibility

The grants are open to South African citizens or permanent residents only. Grant applicants should be either permanently employed at a recognised research institution or be in a long term contract (at least for the duration of the project).

Only one research proposal will be considered for funding per individual applicant and once granted, only one such grant may be held by an individual until the project has been completed. Research grant 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 considerations in determining the success of a funding application will be responsiveness to the RFA topics and 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 through the online portal below. 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 Statement 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: [SAMRC UKRI-MRC AMR Grants](#). Applications submitted via email only will not be accepted.

The full set of application documents must be submitted online by **17:00 South African time on 13 December 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

RFA Release Date	22 October 2024
Application Due Date	13 December 2024
Peer Review of Applications	January-March 2025
Internal Approvals	April-May 2025
Notification of Awards	June 2025

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 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, improve or enhance healthcare, or contribute to the development of new medicines for AMR; whether the application utilises novel theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or sources of compounds; the extent to which the results of the project will contribute to advancements in drug discovery or to solving barriers to progress in the field; and the extent to which the project builds on and/or complements previous investments in the programme.

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 UKRI MRC, 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 1st 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 (local and international), members of the selection committee, including UKRI MRC 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*). Successful applications may be published on the SAMRC website and/or other communication media. 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. The SAMRC has established appropriate, reasonable technical and organizational measures to secure the integrity and confidentiality of the personal information, in line with POPIA.

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.UKRI.AMR@mrc.ac.za