

HFSP Masterclass in Grant Writing attracts great attention for blue skies research



The [Human Frontier Science Program Organization \(HFSPO\)](#), in collaboration with its South African members, viz. the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and the National Research Foundation (NRF), invited expression of interests for participation in the HFSP Masterclass: Grant writing workshop held at the NRF in Pretoria during 26-29 November 2024. The aim was to prepare South African scientists to apply for the HFSPO fellowships and grants in 2025.

The HFSP Master Class brought together scientists interested in HFSP for a special workshop offering hands-on training in grant writing led by experienced HFSP reviewers with integration of examples of HFSP supported research projects, introductions to HFSP programs, and interactive live exchanges with scientists in South Korea and India.

The workshop program included pre-meeting writing tasks for scientific abstracts which were assessed remotely by the training team and discussed live at the meeting hub. Onsite writing tasks included individual writing tasks (public abstracts) and team efforts (drafting a research plan for a letter of intent).

This call was open to early stage and established researchers working in the **life sciences**, as well as Doctoral students/Postdoctoral fellows working on a **biological topic** who want to embark on a novel and frontier project focusing on the **life sciences**. Previous unsuccessful applicants of HFSP grants were also eligible for nomination. Only researchers, Doctoral students and Postdoctoral fellows registered at South African institutions were allowed to be nominated.

The successful South African workshop, led by Barbara Pauly from the HFSPO was attended by a total of 30 nominees from universities and science councils.

Ms Pauly explained the importance of the following criteria for a successful application: novelty; interdisciplinarity (novel combinations of expertise); team integration and teams being inter-continental. She also advised what not to submit to the HFSPO: applications that were a logical extension of ongoing work, except for early career researchers; no past experience; using past or ongoing collaborations; two co-applicants in the same country; hidden collaborators; insufficient detail in the application; too much

technical jargon. In essence, highly original work that is truly frontier and a major advance; not fundable by other funding agencies; the team members are all needed to solve the problem; team members have clearly differing expertise and are complimentary. Thus, high novelty and high risk will make a successful HFSP application.

The attendees were much more confident after the workshop as expressed by Professor David Katerere, from Tshwane University of Technology and an SAMRC Mid-Career Scientist Programme beneficiary who found his experience very positive. Dr Nokulunga Hlengwa from the University of Zululand said that this workshop has brought out “her inner scientist child”. In addition, Dr Vundli Ramokolo, an epidemiologist from the SAMRC, said that this masterclass has allowed her to “dream again and think out of the box”. “The past three days at the #HFSP workshop have been truly inspiring! It was a privilege to collaborate with brilliant minds from India, South Korea, and South Africa while learning to craft bold, innovative research ideas” said Ms Botle Damane from the University of Pretoria. Dr Dawood, the Division Manager of the SAMRC Research Capacity Development Division said that “I am truly excited by this new partnership and am looking forward to seeing the applications that are submitted next year.

