**SAMRC RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE AT SELECTED UNIVERSITIES (RCDI)**

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| **Closing date:****26 October 2025** |

**REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA) 2025/2026**

The South African Medical Research Council’s Research Capacity Development Initiative (RCDI) provides an opportunity for researchers at institutions previously and/or currently constrained by inadequate access to resources to access funds that will enable the institutions and researchers to improve their contribution to the generation of new knowledge towards addressing priority health challenges in South Africa and to build overall health research capacity within the institutions. To date, the programme has supported researchers from eight selected HDIs, including University of Limpopo, University of Venda, University of Zululand, University of Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu University, University of the Western Cape, Mangosuthu University of Technology and Sefako Makgatho University.

This 2025/2026 request for applications (RFA) is specifically for researchers (principal investigators) based at the following institutions:

* **University of Limpopo (UL)**
* **University of Venda (UNIVEN)**
* **University of Zululand (UNIZULU)**
* **University of Fort Hare (UFH**)

This phase of the programme aims to (1) broaden the health research portfolio established through grants awarded in the first two cohorts (2015-2025), (2) strengthen the potential for public health impact, and (3) build the research capacity of promising early- and mid-stage academics through mentorship and collaboration. It includes several interventions, including direct project support, RCDI-nested postdoctoral fellowship and postgraduate programmes. These are aimed at building research capacity and scientific leadership by supporting quality science, strengthening the research team and improving the supervision experience of the RCDI-principal investigators.

In the first step, research projects led by principal investigators (PI) based at the selected universities will be selected for funding based on scientific merit and experience of the PI. Where required, postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students may then be nominated, subject to approval from the SAMRC and the availability of funding, to work on the funded project, supervised by the principal investigator funded under the RCDI programme. The principal investigator is further afforded the opportunity to access a mentor.

The priority research areas for this RFA are: Non-Communicable Diseases, Violence and Injury, Infectious Diseases, Maternal and Child Health, Health Systems, and Public Health Innovation. Research projects that contribute to the mandate of the SAMRC and demonstrate potential for public health impact will receive preference.

The RFA considers two categories of principal investigators: Early-stage investigators and Mid-level investigators.

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|  | **Category 1: Early-stage investigators** | **Category 2: Mid-level investigators** |
| Qualification (Minimum) | Doctorate | Doctorate |
| Age | ≤ 45 years (please provide strong motivation for deviation) | ≥ 45 years (please provide strong motivation for deviation) |
| Experience | ≤ 5 years since completion of PhD  | > 5 years in an academic/research post since completion of PhD |
| Affiliation | Must be in an established academic or research post, i.e. permanent full-time employed, or in a long-term contract of employment (at least for the duration of the project), salaried by the university. | Must be in an established academic or research post, i.e. permanent full-time employed, or in a long-term contract of employment (at least for the duration of the project), salaried by the university. |
| Collaboration | Must demonstrate strong collaboration with local research-intensive Universities / Institutions | Must demonstrate strong collaboration with local research-intensive Universities / Institutions |

Note: Staff who have not yet obtained their doctoral degrees are not eligible for this RFA. They may apply for research costs under a targeted Request for Applications for RCDI-HDI Staff Development Support, which is designed for staff who cannot apply for any scholarship but need a co-funding model to achieve their MSc/PhD degrees. The value of the support varies between R100,000 and R200,000 per year, for up to 3 years.

**Value and duration of the award**

Early-stage and mid-level investigators from the 4 listed universities may apply through this RFA for research grants in the amount of R200,000-R250,000 p.a. over 3 years, renewable each year, subject to satisfactory performance and the availability of funds. The aim is to award up to R1,000,000 (4-5 projects) per university per year in total for three years; however, the SAMRC reserves the right to make more or fewer awards per institution depending on the number of fundable applications received.

Following award of the research grants, successful principal investigators will have the opportunity to apply for additional support for the research team, where required, including a postdoctoral fellow and/or postgraduate student through separate postdoctoral and scholarship awards as follows: a) Postdoc fellowship = R350,000 p.a. for 3 years; b) PhD scholarship = R250,000 p.a. for 3 years; c) MSc scholarship = R200,000 p.a. for 2 years.

Successful principal investigators will also have the opportunity to access a mentor for the purposes of improving their skills and ability to successfully execute the funded project and supervise the project team.

These awards will be made on a competitive basis and renewed annually based on the achievement of clear milestones and deliverables.

**Eligibility**

* South African citizens and permanent residents.
* Full-time academic or research staff engaged in health/medical research employed at *the University of Limpopo (UL), University of Venda (UNIVEN), University of Zululand (UNIZULU) or University of Fort Hare (UFH).*
* Preference will be given to suitably qualified candidates from the designated groups. Designated groups refer to black people (African, Coloured and Indian), women and people with disabilities, in terms of the Employment Equity Act.
* Previous RCDI-principal investigators are not eligible; however, they can serve as mentors or co-principal investigators.

**Selection Criteria**

* The research proposals submitted by the principal investigator must be deemed to have strong scientific merit.
* Research areas and expected output must be outlined and linked to the SAMRC’s strategic research priorities.
* Applicants must preferably have a collaboration with a research-intensive university or science council.

**Application process**

The Research Offices at the selected universities must support the researchers in their application processes. It is the responsibility of host institutions to verify and confirm the appropriateness, completeness and correctness of all information submitted by their researchers to the SAMRC as part of their applications. Applicants are required to complete the **Application form**, **Milestone table**, **Budget form**, and **Nomination of Reviewers’** form (four forms in total per project), as well as **the Institutional** **Support letter**.

In addition to the online form, the applicant must submit the completed forms and all required documentation to RCDgrants.applications@mrc.ac.za by **26 October 2025.**

**Selection process**

Eligible applications are subject to a peer-review process, and the review reports are assessed by a selection committee, which scores the application against standard objective criteria and recommends fundability.

For enquiries, contact Dr Frederic Nduhirabandi (at frederic.nduhirabandi@mrc.ac.za or +27 21 938 0461).

**The South African Medical Research Council reserves the right to disqualify ineligible, incomplete and/or inappropriate applications, amend the conditions of award where advisable, extend the closing date or make no awards at all.**

**Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)**

*Please note that by submitting your application and other supporting documents, the SAMRC concludes that you are a competent person to consent and that you are giving consent to the SAMRC to process all personal information contained in the application forms and supporting documents for the purposes of evaluating the applications, selecting beneficiaries, and executing the awards in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act No 4 of 2013 (as amended). You can read the full details on the act here:* [*https://popia.co.za/*](https://popia.co.za/)*.*

*The SAMRC as a responsible statutory science council will comply with POPIA. The SAMRC will receive personal information through applications submitted to the SAMRC for the purposes of applying for funding. The personal information requested on the application template is necessary for the SAMRC to fully evaluate the applications for funding. This information will be shared with members of the Selection Committees of the SAMRC and external funders and/or stakeholders where applicable as well as the SAMRC management for the purposes of processing the applications. 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 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.*

*Should you not approve the use of your personal information as outlined above, then please refrain from applying.*

**REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS (RFA) 2025/2026**

**APPLICATION FORM**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

* Please read all the instructions before you complete each section of the application.
* Use Calibri font size 11, single line spacing to complete the proposal. DO NOT COMPLETE THE FIRST PAGE OF THIS FORM.
* The applications will be received in two categories: Early-stage investigators and Mid-level investigators (see RFA for categories). Each applicant must also nominate a co-principal investigator and the main collaborator at research-intensive institutions. Where applicable, a mentor may be also nominated.
* Each application must comprise the following documents (please work together with the University Research Office to ensure completeness of all documents before the closing date):
	+ Application form
	+ Annexure 1: Motivation letter and CV of PI
	+ Annexure 2: CV of co-PI
	+ Annexure 3: Bio-sketch of the main collaborator
	+ Annexure 4: Milestone Table
	+ Annexure 5: Budget Form
	+ Annexure 6: Nomination of Reviewer Form
	+ Annexure 7: Institutional Commitment Letter
* Completed application forms including all annexures must be submitted to RCDgrants.applications@mrc.ac.za by the closing date.
* Late submission or incomplete and/or inappropriate applications will not be accepted.

**FOR OFFICE USE**

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| **University:** |
| **School/Faculty/Department**  |  |
| **Principal investigator** | Title:  |
| Name & Surname: |
| **Contact Details**  | Tel (work): | Mobile: |
| Email (work): | Other: |
| **Proposed project**  |  |
| **Category:** |
| **Administration** | **Date** | **Name** | **Designation** | **Signature** |
| First received |  |  |  |  |
| Review Assessment | Date: |
| Decision | Date: |
| EMC Approval: Yes: No:  | Comments: |

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| RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL (TITLE):  | Application category *(mark the relevant category with X)* |
| **Early-stage** |  |
| **Mid-stage** |  |
| 1. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI) DETAILS
 |
| Title  |  |
| Names & surname |  |
| SA ID number |  | Gender |  |
| Disability status |  | Race |  |
| Qualifications | Degree/Diploma | Name of Institution | Date obtained |
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|  |  |  |  |
| Current Position |  |
| Date of appointment (current position) |  |
| Type of employment *(i.e., part-time, full-time, duration of the contract)* |  |
| Department  |  |
| School/Faculty |  |
| Name and address of University/Research Institution |  |
| Contact number(s) | Work: | Mobile: |
| Email  | Work: | Other: |
| 1. A. CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI) DETAILS:
 |
| Title  |  |
| Names & surname |  |
| SA ID number |  | Gender |  |
| Disability status |  | Race |  |
| Qualifications | Degree/Diploma | Name of Institution | Date obtained |
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|  |  |   |  |
| Current Position |  |
| Date of appointment in current position |  |
| Type of employment (part-time, full-time, duration of the contract) |  |
| Department  |  |
| School/Faculty |  |
| Name and address of university/research institution |  |
| Contact number(s) | Work: | Mobile: |
| Email  | Work: | Other: |
| 3. B. RESEARCH MENTOR DETAILS (IF NOT THE SAME AS THE CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR): |
| Title  |  |
| Names & surname |  |
| SA ID number |  | Gender |  |
| Qualifications | Degree/Diploma | Name of Institution | Date obtained |
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| Current Position |  |
| Date of appointment in current position |  |
| Type of employment (part-time, full-time, duration of the contract) |  |
| Department  |  |
| School/Faculty |  |
| Name and address of university/research institution |  |
| Contact number(s) | Work: | Mobile: |
| Email  | Work: | Other: |

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| 3. RESEARCH PROPOSAL |
| TITLE OF PROJECT |  |
| RESEARCH AREA (please specify) |  |
| ABSTRACT & KEYWORDS *(max. 300 words:)**Please provide an abstract for a technical audience and five keywords to describe the project* |
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| SPECIFIC AIMS *(250 words).*: *State concisely the goals of the proposed research, and summarise the expected outcomes*  |
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| BACKGROUND, RATIONALE, SIGNIFICANCE, AND INNOVATION *(max. 2000 words):**Describe the global, regional, or national health challenge under investigation and why the proposed study is important and will contribute to solving this problem* |
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| RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS *(max. 2000 words)*:* *Provide the research design and project or experimental plan that will be utilized to answer the research questions. Address the feasibility of the research plan and how the approach will accomplish the goals outlined in the specific aims.*
* *Provide the data-collection and analysis strategies/approaches to be used*
* *Please refer to this section when completing the Milestone Table (a separate template supplied)*
 |
| Study design: Study Setting: Sampling: Data Collection and Management:Data analysis:  |
| DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS (*max. 250 words):**Indicate the main avenues through which the results of the research will be disseminated to the scientific/academic and public audiences.* |
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| RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE *(max 350 words)** *Describe the availability/access to research infrastructure, laboratory resources, at-risk and patient populations, databases, biobanks and other unique technologies that will enhance the research endeavours.*
* *Include a justification and description of site development where needed.*
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| RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT / MENTORING ACTIVITIES PROPOSED AND SUCCESSION AND CONTINUITY PLAN *(max. 350 words)**Indicate how the execution of the research project will contribute to the training of postgraduate students, junior research/academic staff, health personnel or community members where the research will be undertaken and how it will contribute to transformation at individual and/or institutional level (keeping in mind that no grant money may be used for bursaries). How many postdoctoral, PhD or MSc students will be recruited to work on the project?* |
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| NETWORKING /COLLABORATION PLAN *(max. 350 words*)*Provide details of current networking/collaboration initiatives with researchers at other institutions which are well established in research. If none currently provide a detailed plan of how this will be achieved in the first year of funding. (Note: Networking and collaboration must appear in the milestone table (templated attached)).* |
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| ETHICAL APPROVAL *(max. 100 words)**If applicable, please provide the details of the ethical approval for your project and if no ethical approval has been obtained yet, the plan for obtaining ethical approval within three months of having been awarded the grant. NO funding can be released before ethical approval is not obtained.* |
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| REFERENCES CITED *(max. 1000 words)*: |
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| OTHER SAMRC AWARDS: *Please indicate any other awards from the SAMRC received in the last 3 years and/or currently held.* |
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| OTHER FUNDING: *Please list any other funding you have applied for and/or received for the proposed project*. |
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| 3. EXPECTED OUTPUTS *Please list and briefly describe the anticipated research outputs.* *These should include:** *Publications: At least one first author publication per year. It is strongly suggested that a protocol paper and a review (systematic or scoping) paper be published in the first year of funding. Policy briefs or technical reports will also be accepted in this category. It is highly recommended that manuscripts are submitted to high impact factor journals for publication.*
* *Conference Attendance: Attendance of at least one international conference over the funding period with an abstract accepted for an oral or poster presentation.*
* *Scholar supervision: Graduation of at least one Masters (Early level category) scholar and supervision of a PhD student (Mid-level category*).
* *Training and workshops: Attendance of at least one training event per year*
* *Research translation: Production of at least one output (layman’s publication or infogram) that will translate research findings to a general audience*
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| Output 1 |
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| Output 2: |
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| Output 3 |
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| Output 4: |
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| Output 5: |
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| Output 6: |
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| Output 7: |
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| 4. POTENTIAL OUTCOMES (250-400 words)*Please list and briefly describe the anticipated research outcomes.* *These should include:** *the potential application, uptake or use of outputs by the research enterprise or by society, business, government etc.*
* *This shows potential influence in policy/industry/NGOs and communities, innovations, transformed researcher cohorts, postgraduate employment, etc.*
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| 5. POTENTIAL IMPACTS (250-350 words)*Impact is a beneficial change in society or knowledge advancement, brought about as a direct or indirect result of the SAMRC’s research support interventions, whether planned or unintended; immediate or longer-term. Knowledge impact refers to scientific advances in understanding, interpretation, methods, theory, application, and related advances that bring about positive change within and/across disciplines and fields. Societal impact refers to the value that research adds to society across various spheres, whether social, economic, or environmental. Societal impact reflects the direct or indirect relationships between research, or the research process, and improvement in the quality of people’s lives, inclusive of innovation, technological advancements, improved sustainability, and policy developments.**Please list and briefly describe the anticipated research impacts.* *These should include:** *Potential impact of the research, highlighting for example, transformation, external partnerships; case studies demonstrating social, economic, environmental and knowledge impact.*
* *The impact statement should state the potential impact, how it will be achieved, and how it will be demonstrated or assessed (what is the evidence to show that it has been achieved and assessed).*
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| 6. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR |
| Name (please print) | **Position** |
|  |  |
| Signature | **Date** |
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| **7 ANNEXURES***Please check and attach the following documents as Annexures to the application.* |
| 1. Motivation letter and a full CV of the Applicant Principal Investigator (s) with publication list highlighting journal articles in the research area of the proposed project (using Vancouver referencing)
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| 1. A full CV of the Co-Principal Investigator (s) with publication list highlighting journal articles in the research area of the proposed project (using Vancouver referencing)
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| 1. A brief bio-sketch (two-page NIH format) of a senior research staff/collaborator
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| 1. Milestone Table
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| 1. Budget Form
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| 1. Nomination of Reviewer Form
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| 1. Institutional Commitment Letter: The commitment of the hosting institution to provide all necessary support to the applicant (University Research Office)
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| **8. USE OF GENERATIVE AI TOOLS***When developing funding proposals, researchers must ensure generative AI tools are used responsibly and in accordance with relevant legal and ethical standards where these exist or as they develop. As best practice, any output from generative AI tools in funding applications should be acknowledged. Please, therefore, acknowledge any outputs from generative AI tools in this funding application (highlighting AI tools used and relevant parts of the application)* |
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