

STRATEGIC HEALTH INNOVATION PARTNERSHIPS

Request for Applications (RFA):

Eastern Cape Health Priorities

SAMRC-RFA-SHIP 04 May 2020

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Closing Date: 11 September 2020

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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.

Strategic Health Innovation Partnerships (SHIP) is one of the programs within the Grants, Innovation and Product Development (GIPD) division of the SAMRC. SHIP is a partnership between the SAMRC, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and other funders aimed at supporting multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research and innovation projects towards the development of new or improved vaccines, therapeutics, medical devices, diagnostics and services in key health priority areas. While the primary emphasis of SHIP funding is on strengthening product development and innovation activities and capacity nationally, it is expected that funded projects will also contribute to the scientific output in the form of publications, the development of human capacity and transformation of the science base in South Africa to catalyse the South African Bio-Economy.

SHIP was established in 2013 and has funded a portfolio of more than 50 projects, selected primarily through open, competitive requests for applications (RFAs) in specific priority areas. The SAMRC is focused in building high quality research, innovation and capacity development in the Historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa and Historically disadvantaged Institutions in the country to help improve the lives of ordinary South Africans.

As a first into this direction, the SAMRC piloted an inaugural Research Symposium "Advancing Research in the Eastern Cape Province" in East London on 29-30 August 2019 at the East London International Convention Centre. All four Eastern Cape universities were well represented. The objectives of the symposium were to showcase health research in the Eastern Cape, identify health priorities and identify research gaps in the Eastern Cape, and to foster research collaboration, partnerships and networks with the Eastern Cape universities.

The SAMRC is now seeking to fund projects that were identified as priorities from the symposium. The impact of COVID-19 on the above would also be of interest. This could be through health systems or digital based research

The goal of the SAMRC is to repeat this scoping exercise in other provinces from 2021.

2. Funding opportunity description

The SAMRC SHIP program, is providing seed funding up to R4 million for this RFA to support health research at the four main public research institutions located in the Eastern Cape, namely the University of Fort Hare (UFH), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), Rhodes University (RU) and Nelson Mandela University (NMU). The intent of this RFA is to support collaborative research that will advance knowledge in the selected priority areas towards creation of new products or solutions to address the health burdens of the Eastern Cape which can be scaled into other provinces. We are seeking to make competitive awards for projects that run for two years with a total budget between R 200 000 to R 500 000 each in the following areas:

Maternal, Child and Women Health

Maternal health refers to the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period. The major causes of maternal morbidity and mortality include hemorrhage, infection, high blood pressure, unsafe abortion, and obstructed labour. We are seeking proposals to understand the causes of maternal and infant mortality in the province and explore interventions to address this. We are also interested in understanding how the use of traditional medicines in pregnancy impact maternal and child health outcomes.

Non – Communicable Diseases focusing on Diabetes and Cancer

With this RFA we are interested in seeking interventions that create enhanced awareness of Cancer and Diabetes as patients often present themselves at a late stage when interventions are limited. We are looking for proposals that have solutions to enhance patient care and broaden prevention efforts.

Mental Health

As many as one in six South Africans suffer from anxiety, depression or substance-abuse problems, according to statistics released by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG). Stigma is a real issue and many people do not seek help for this reason – resulting in under-reporting of the diseases.

Associated with this, is the issue of Gender Based Violence, the impact of Alcohol and substance abuse and the stigma associated with COVID-19. In this RFA we are looking at proposals that will deal with the challenges of mental health, GBV, the impacts of alcohol and substance abuse and the stigma associated with COVID - 19.

Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH)

The Eastern Cape Province is a province which is deeply entrenched in cultural values and it is difficult for the youth to speak about Sexual Reproductive Health with elders. It is with this reason that we are seeking proposals that can help address SRH in the Eastern Cape, by developing solutions for prevention or treatment. By combating Sexual Reproductive Health, we hope to impact the prevalence of major health issues in the province such as HIV/AIDS, STI's.

3. Eligibility

This is an open call for proposals from researchers based at Eastern Cape universities, science councils (including the SAMRC) and other public research organisations, including:

- Any institution approved by the Minister of Science and Technology for NRF funding
- Locally registered not-for profit research organisations whose primary purpose is to conduct research and/or product development – such entities should preferably have at least one local university or science council collaborator and may be subject to due diligence before the award of funds

The following are **not** eligible to apply for funding through this RFA but may be included as sub-contractors if they provide a service or capability that is not available among the project partners or among other eligible organizations:

- Private / for-profit South African and foreign companies and institutions
- Foreign not-for-profit companies, research institutions, universities, civil society groups and non-governmental organizations

In addition to the above, applicants / principal investigators must be South African citizens or permanent residence holders. While there is no limit to the number of applications submitted per institution, principal investigators 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.

4. 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
- Are from non-eligible organizations

All applications must be submitted using the SAMRC Proposal and Budget templates available on the SAMRC website (insert links). 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 – templates are provided for projects that either include only 1 PI or multiple PIs
- CVs of the principal investigator

The full set of application documents must be emailed to ship.rfps@mrc.ac.za by 6 pm SA time on 11 September 2020. 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	31 July 2020
Application Due Date	11 September 2020, 6pm SAST
Peer Review of Applications	September-October 2020
Internal Approvals	November 2020
Notification of Awards	December 2020

For more information on the SAMRC's General Terms and Conditions of Funding, including allowable and non-allowable costs, please go to <http://www.samrc.ac.za/innovation/funding>.

5. 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.

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.

Peer review

Each responsive and complete application received by the due date will be reviewed by local and international reviewers who are experts in the RFA priority areas. Reviewers will consider each of the review criteria below in determining scientific and technical merit and provide an overall score for the proposal.

Significance

Does the proposal fit well within the objectives and scientific remit set out in the RFA? Will the project generate new scientific knowledge and technical capability? Do the applicants indicate awareness of complementary research underway elsewhere and how their research will add value to the field? Will the project likely result in a new and/or improved health product, practise or solution, impact public health policy and /or influence clinical practice in the relevant priority areas listed in the RFA?

Investigator(s) and research team

Is the team a single institution or PI or large, multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary? If the project is collaborative in nature, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise? Are the PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to and qualified to undertake the project? Do they have international scientific standing in the field, including publications and citations? Does the application address capacity development and support of new investigators?

Innovation/Impact

Is the proposed project and approach highly innovative? Does the proposed project challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilising novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? What is the stage of development of the technology, i.e. is it still basic research or has proof of concept and clear practical application been demonstrated? Is the technology risk high or low? Is there a likelihood of generating strong and protectable IP with freedom to operate?

Environment

Will the scientific environment in which the research will be conducted contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the proposed project? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, patient populations, existing research programmes collaborative arrangements or other resources?

Methodology and Approach.

Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are the milestones and deliverables clearly thought through and articulated? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Has sufficient preliminary or pilot work been done to inform the design and feasibility of the study? Is the proposed approach relevant to the socio-political, cultural, legislative and economic contexts of the study settings? Are the plans feasible, with a realistic timeline? Is there credible supporting data on which the study is based (applicants must supply this). Are all of the necessary components for product development in place and/or available to the investigators?

6. Selection of Awardees

The award of grants emanating from this call will be determined by the SHIP Steering Committee and the Executive Management Committee of the SAMRC, taking into account the results of the peer review process. The SAMRC may also consider additional factors, such as geographical and institutional diversity and transformation in making its final determinations.

Based on the scientific 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 applicant's 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.
- Successful awards may be subject to addressing reviewer comments and/or negotiation of project plans and budget.
- Grants will be paid to the institution where the principal investigator is employed, as set out in a funding agreement to be concluded between the parties.
- No grant funds will be paid over 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. Contact Details

Please direct any requests for information and questions/queries on this RFA **by email** to Babalo Buzwe Ntlebi at Babalo.Ntlebi@mrc.ac.za.