



# CANCER RESEARCH PROJECTS

**Request for Applications (RFA)**

**SAMRC-RFA-SRI-01-2025**

**Publication date: 20 November 2025**

**Closing date for applications: 9 January 2026**

## 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 South Africa and supports high quality research, innovation and capacity development through a variety of grant programs and strategic partnerships.

Cancer has become an increasingly significant public health concern in South Africa, contributing to nearly one in ten deaths nationwide<sup>1</sup>. The most commonly diagnosed cancers in South Africa mirror global trends but also reveal distinct local patterns influenced by social, economic, and biological factors. Among women, breast and cervical cancers are the leading types. Breast cancer alone accounts for more than one in five female cancer diagnoses, while cervical cancer remains a major cause of morbidity and mortality, especially in low-income and rural communities where screening and vaccination services are limited. Among men, prostate cancer is the most common and one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths. Other common cancers affecting both sexes include colorectal, lung, and skin cancers, reflecting the combined effects of changing lifestyles, environmental exposures, and an ageing population.

The SAMRC is issuing this RFA to advance the *National Department of Health's Cancer Prevention and Control Plan*<sup>2</sup>, which prioritises prevention, early detection, equitable treatment, and palliative care.

## 2. GOAL AND AIMS OF THE RFA

The overarching goal of this RFA is to support projects that address cancer challenges in South Africa. The aims are to:

- i. Generate new knowledge with the potential to impact on health policy/practice/innovation;
- ii. Enhance the leadership role of South African cancer research locally and globally;
- iii. Increase the number of peer reviewed scientific papers, including papers in high impact journals;
- iv. Contribute to human capacity development, through training and mentoring of post-graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

## 4. RESEARCH SCOPE

The scope of the proposed research should fall under the following 5 (five) cancer research thematic areas:

- Prevention;
- Early Detection and Diagnosis;
- Treatment;
- Palliative Care, and

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics South Africa, Cancer in South Africa 2023. Report No. 03-08-00

<sup>2</sup> National Department of Health, National Cancer Strategic Framework for South Africa 2017 - 2022

- Survivorship.

## 5. ELIGIBILITY

This is an open call for proposals from investigators who hold a post-graduate/medical qualification, preferably a PhD, MBChB or equivalent degree based at South African universities, science councils (including the SAMRC) and other organisations, including:

- Any institution approved by the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation for NRF funding;
- Locally registered not-for profit research organisations whose primary purpose is to conduct research – such entities may be subject to due diligence before the award of funds;
- Foreign entities are not eligible to apply for funding through this RFA, but may be included as collaborators if they provide a service, technology or capability that is not available among the project partners or among other eligible organisations.

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 organisation, PIs may only submit one application each as the PI but may be involved in more than one application if listed as a co-investigator.

## 6. PROJECT DURATION AND FUNDING CAPS

Successful projects will be supported for a maximum period of two (2) years.

The SAMRC plans to fund five (5) meritorious projects. The maximum funding per year is shown in Table 1.

**Table1. Funding caps per project**

Year	Max. funding per project (excl. VAT)
Year 1	R400,000
Year 2	R545,00

## 7. APPLICATION SCHEDULE

The timelines for the application process are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Application timelines**

Stages	Date/period
1. Publication of RFA	20 November 2025
2. Deadline for submitting online applications	9 January 2026
3. Evaluation period (indicative)	10 Jan 2026 – 15 March 2026
4. Notification of awards (indicative):	March 2026
5. Grant agreement between SAMRC and host organisation finalised (indicative)	March – May 2026

## **8. APPLICATION GUIDELINES**

The application must address the following areas:

**i. Problem identification (max 800 words)**

- Give a brief description of the cancer research problem that will be addressed by the proposed project; and
- Outline the nature, source, extent and impact of the problem to be addressed in the broad global and regional context, giving particular attention to the extent of the problem in South Africa.

**ii. Rationale and motivation (max 800 words)**

- Provide a background and scientific rationale for the proposed research, outlining, where appropriate, the theoretical framework that forms the basis of the research, and discussing how the proposed research will address the problem identified above; and
- Indicate how the proposed research is expected to contribute to advancing health-relevant knowledge and/or contribute to improvements in cancer outcomes.

**iii. Research aims and objectives (max 400 words)**

- Outline the main aim(s) of the proposed research and specify the research objectives that are to be achieved.

**iv. Research design and methods (max 1500 words)**

- Noting that the overarching goal of the programme is to support research projects that address South African cancer problems, give an account of the overall research approach and the following:
  - specifics of the research design, including any multi-disciplinary aspects;
  - the research methods and/or experimental techniques to be employed, including human subjects protection plan for clinical studies;
  - the data collection and analysis strategies / approaches to be adopted;
  - the statistical treatment and analysis of data, and
  - responsibilities and timelines in doing the work (who will do what when?) .

Applicants should give a detailed account, as required above, of the targeted outcomes in each of the two years of their proposed research. The research design and methods should be well aligned with the stated research aims and objectives.

**v. Expected outputs/outcomes/impact (max 1200 words)**

- Outline the expected direct and/or indirect outputs/outcomes/impact of the research. It includes:
  - the advancement of scientific/health knowledge;
  - human capacity development (number of post-graduates trained and post-docs mentored);
  - specific research outputs (e.g. publications peer reviewed journals); and
  - Contributions the research is envisaged to make improvements in cancer outcomes.

**vi. Budget**

Provide a detailed budget for both years of the project on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet template included on the online application link:

<https://forms.samrc.ac.za/surveys/?s=4KRXL8MDTPNMY3NE>.

Allowable costs include:

- Personnel: *Please note only fixed-term contract research staff and research support staff is an allowable cost. Researchers who are on the host institution's payroll as permanent staff members may not claim salary reimbursement from this grant;*
- Consultants: *These may include both local and/or foreign consultants. A motivation is required;*
- Equipment: *Partial or full support for the cost of equipment may be requested. Funding for infrastructure costs is not allowed;*
- Office and laboratory supplies;
- Sub-contracts;
- Travel & accommodation: *Must be directly related to the execution of the project;* and
- Other research costs.

Non-allowable costs include:

- Purchase or construction of a building;
- Rental costs for space that is owned by the institution;
- Recruitment costs for staff; and
- Purchase of office furniture.

**9. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Institutions submitting applications for funding are required, through the Institutional Research Office or relevant institutional office, to:

- Ensure completeness of applications, approve and authorise all applications submitted;
- Ensure timely submission of project reports and audited annual financial statements, as requested.

## **10. APPLICATION PROCESS**

The call for applications will open on **20 November 2025** and close on **9 January 2026**. All applications must be made on the online application form:

<https://forms.samrc.ac.za/surveys/?s=4KRXL8MDTPNMY3NE>.

Applications submitted by other means will not be accepted.

Please note that all applications must be approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) or equivalent position of the research administration at the institution that submits the application.

## **11. EVALUATION PROCESS**

There will be a two-step review and evaluation process, viz,

- Internal SAMRC screening for responsiveness to all the specified administrative and procedural provisions required in the RFA, and
- Peer-review to assess the scientific merit (and other review criteria as specified below) of applications found to be responsive to the RFA provisions.

### **11.1 Internal screening**

All applications will be screened by the SAMRC for completeness and responsiveness to the goals of the RFA and its administrative requirements/provisions. If the application is found incomplete or unresponsive to the provisions described in the RFA, the application will not be subject to further review.

### **11.2 Peer-review of qualifying applications**

Each responsive application will be reviewed by experts in the thematic areas addressed in each application. These review comments will be provided to an unconflicted peer review committee which will consider these comments and further review all the eligible applications to provide an assessment of the scientific merit of each application and a funding recommendation to the SAMRC for its consideration.

### **11.3 Rating of applications**

Reviewers will consider each of the review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major scientific impact. For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field. The criteria for rating applications is as follows:

- **Significance.** Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field of research?

- **Investigator(s).** Are the PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? If Early-Stage Investigators or New Investigators, or in the early stages of independent careers, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If the project is collaborative in nature, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise; is their leadership approach, governance and organisational structure appropriate for the project?
- **Innovation.** Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilising novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?
- **Approach.** Is the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed? If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for the protection of human subjects from research risks adequate?
- **Environment.** Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Is the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

## 12. GRANT PAYMENTS

Grants will be paid to the host organisation where the PI is employed. The disbursement of funds will be according to the disbursement schedule agreed to by the SAMRC and the host organisation and will be set out in the agreement between the parties.

## 13. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)

### 13.1 Reporting

All PIs must submit annual reports from the year of receipt of the grant. Reports must be completed on the template provided by the SAMRC.

### 13.2 Scientific compliance

#### 13.2.1 Ethics

All PIs are required to maintain the highest ethical and safety standards in conducting the research, particularly when human and animal subjects are involved. It is the responsibility of the PI to comply with all relevant regulations in this regard, including those of the institution at which the research is

carried out. An ethics approval certificate from a National Health Research Ethics Committee approved Institutional Ethics Committee must be submitted to the SAMRC in respect of successful applications before full funding can be released.

### **13.2.2 Intellectual Property Rights**

Funding by the SAMRC is subject to the provisions of the SAMRC *Intellectual Property Policy* (<http://innovation.mrc.ac.za/policy.htm>) as well as the Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development Act 51 of 2008 (<http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=94343>).

The SAMRC may require the PI in the future, in the event of any intellectual property being developed from the project, to sign an intellectual property sharing agreement for each project funded by the SAMRC as part of the acceptance of this grant.

### **13.2.3 Change of project leadership**

In the event the PI leaves the Institution for whatever reason, the SAMRC must be informed (where possible, prior to the departure of the PI from the Institution), of proposed alternate arrangements for the continued management and leadership of the project, with complete documentation that demonstrates the qualifications of the alternate leadership. After reviewing the proposed change, the SAMRC may decide to terminate the award if there is a determination of insufficient continuing expertise to lead the approved research to a successful conclusion.

If the new PI is approved by the SAMRC, she/he will be required to sign a revised “Acceptance of Conditions of Grant Award” and submit a CV as well as a revised management plan.

## **14. IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

Please take note the following important information:

- i. The SAMRC will utilise the results of the peer review to determine which meritorious applications receive funding. The SAMRC may also consider additional factors such as a balance in the range of topics supported in making its final determinations;
- ii. Based on the scientific merit of the applications and/or budget limitations, the SAMRC may award fewer or more grants than set out above;
- iii. The SAMRC may award grants with different funding amounts and/or different durations;
- iv. The SAMRC may seek to verify any information provided by an applicant through independent research or by third parties approved by the SAMRC;
- v. The SAMRC may use text, video or other visual representation submitted by applicants on the SAMRC website or on SAMRC materials for publicity and/or public awareness;
- vi. 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 will comply with POPIA. The SAMRC will receive personal information through research proposals/applications submitted to the SAMRC for the purposes of applying for funding. 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 and/or Grant Committees of the SAMRC 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 completed 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.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Please direct your requests for information and questions/queries to:

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