GRANTS, INNOVATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

SAMRC-RFA-SIR-2025

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS/PROPOSALS 2025
SELF-INITIATED RESEARCH GRANTS
https://www.samrc.ac.za/funding/self-initiated-research

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) is pleased to announce the 2025 request for applications for funding under the **Self-Initiated Research** (SIR) Grants Programme. The SIR Programme is designed to support original research initiated by a researcher at a recognized research institution in selected priority health areas.

Eligibility

The primary target of the 2025 SIR call is early-stage investigators; however, applications are invited from both early-stage investigators and mid-level to established researchers, as defined in the table below. Applications from mid-level and established researchers are expected to have a strong focus on capacity building. Applications are limited to South African citizens and permanent residents.

Category 1: Early-stage investigators	**Category 2: Mid-level and established researchers**
Minimum MBChB, BDS, BChD or PhD	Minimum MBChB, BDS, BChD or PhD
1-5 years (conducting research/in a research post) since completion of PhD, BDS, BChD or MBChB (post-graduate students are not eligible to apply)	>5 years (conducting research/in a research post) since completion of PhD, BDS, BChD or MBChB – preferably PI or study coordinator on at least 3 studies
Must have secured a commitment from the host university or research institution listed in the application to host the applicant and project for the length of the grant	Must be in an established academic post, i.e., permanently employed, or in a long-term contract of employment (at least for the duration of the project) salaried by the university or research institution

Applicants that are deemed by the SAMRC to be incorrectly classified into category 1 or 2 may be requested to alter their classification. If you are uncertain, please contact SAMRC.

For the purposes of the SIR Grants Programme, a research institution is defined as a legally constituted institution or organization wherein research is one of the primary purposes for

its existence, including the training of postgraduate students. The broad thrust of the Institution'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.

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. Preference will be given to individuals who have **not** previously been a recipient of an SIR grant. Recipients of other SAMRC grants, including individuals working within SAMRC extra-mural research units, may apply for an SIR grant; however, all such grants must be declared in their application. Research grant applications that are proposing work on behalf of commercial entities will not be considered. Individuals working within SAMRC intra-mural research units are not eligible to apply for an SIR grant.

SIR Grant Details

SIR grants are awarded up to **R200 000** per year for a maximum period of **three years**. These funds provide support for research expenses (materials and consumables; support to attend scientific meetings; small items of equipment, etc.). See ***Terms and Conditions for the Acceptance, Utilization and Management of SAMRC Self-initiated Research Grants*** for details. It is expected that the researchers/applicants already have in place the necessary equipment and facilities required for the proposed research.

Research Priority Areas

Research priority areas that will be considered in the 2025 SIR call are as follows:

- Health Economics and National Health Insurance (NHI)
- Brain, Behaviour, and Mental Health (including neuroscience and brain injury)
- Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
- HIV and TB
- Maternal, Infant, Child and Adolescent Health
- Non-Communicable Diseases
- Other Infectious Diseases including fungal diseases endemic to Africa and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)
- Vaccines, Diagnostics and Drug Discovery
- African Traditional Medicines
- Behavioural science in relation to the uptake and use of health interventions
- Climate change, Environmental Health, Occupational Health and One Health

Applicants are also encouraged to consider including aspects of Translational Research and/or Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their applications.

Please ensure that your application is classified according to the correct priority area. Applications that are incorrectly classified or are deemed by the SAMRC to fall outside these priority areas will be rejected as being non-responsive.

The research should ideally be geared towards generating high quality new knowledge, new medical products, improved or enhanced medical/health practice, effective health promotion strategies or improved health policy and/or functioning of the national health

systems. Applications from mid-level and established researchers must include a clear focus on capacity development.

Application Process

The SAMRC has introduced an online grants management system (RIMS), which allows for easy tracking, analysis, and reporting on applications. All eligible applications must be submitted using this SIR Grants online system **(see appendix A)** and must:

- Be completed online by the applicant.
- Be reviewed online by an authorised person in the research administration office of the institution.
- Be approved online by an authorised person in the research administration office of the institution.
- Be submitted online by the institutional grant approver to reach the SAMRC by 15:59 SAST on **12 December 2025**. The online application system will **close** at this time, and late applications will **NOT** be accepted.

It is the responsibility of host institutions to verify and certify the appropriateness, completeness and correctness of all information submitted by their researchers to the SAMRC as part of their applications for SIR funding. By authorising applications, institutions commit themselves to administering any allocated funding according to the ***Terms and Conditions for the Acceptance, Utilization and Management of SAMRC Self-initiated Research Grants.***

Timelines for the application and review process are as follows:

Steps or actions	Timeline
Call/Request for proposals	31 October 2025
Closing date for online applications – **Your institution may enforce an earlier internal closing date.**	12 December 2025
Peer review process	January 2026 – March 2026
Grants Committee/Review panel meeting(s)	April/May 2026
Approval by the SAMRC's EMC	May/June 2026
Communication of outcomes to applicants	June/July 2026
Acceptance of SIR grants conditions by awardees	July 2026
Payment of grants to institutions	August 2026

Please note the estimated timelines for notification of awards. We request that you do not contact us for an update on your application prior to this date. These dates are subject to cooperation from and timely participation by peer reviewers and may be extended in the event of any challenges in this regard.

Application Checklist

- Completed online SIR Grant application, including the following attachments:
  - Applicant's Curriculum Vitae – maximum length of 5 pages, including a biographical sketch (professional work experience, qualifications, research activities) and publications in the last 3 years of active research.
  - Ethics Clearance Certificate or a letter indicating that the proposal has been submitted to the institution's Ethics Committee. Where ethics approval is not required, please submit a letter from the Institutional Research Office stating why it is not required.
  - Completed SIR Grant Reviewer Nomination Form
  - Completed SIR Grant Budget Form

Applications will not be processed until online review and authorization by the institution has been completed. Incomplete applications and applications without an Ethics Clearance Certificate, proof of ethics submission or a letter from the Institution's Research Office stating why it is not required, will not be considered.

The SAMRC's Grants, Innovation and Product Development Division will provide technical support to applicants and respond to all queries during the application process (refer to contact details).

Review of Proposals and Selection of Awardees

The SIR Grants Programme is highly competitive and has limited funds available. The primary consideration in determining the success of a funding application is the quality of the research proposal. However, equally important to the SAMRC is transformation and building the capacity of, particularly, black and women scientists as well as resource-limited institutions. Thus, proposals that are from principal investigators or institutions meeting these criteria and/or that involve a component of capacity building of or partnership with such individuals and/or institutions will be preferred. These factors are taken into consideration in the review and selection process.

1.) Eligibility screen

After the closing date, all proposals received will be screened for eligibility, responsiveness and compliance with the grant and submission criteria. Proposals that do not meet the criteria will not be processed further.

2.) Peer review

All eligible proposals will be submitted for peer review. Peer reviewers are asked to review proposals according to the criteria listed below. In submitting a research proposal for funding, researchers should therefore make every effort to ensure that the proposals address these aspects comprehensively. It must be emphasized that several proposals were unsuccessful in previous calls due to a lack of detail on the research design and methodology.

Criterion	What the reviewer is asked to comment on
Overall Merit	*What field, health issue or policy, medical care or treatment is addressed by the application? What is the relative importance of the scientific issue(s) raised? How and to what degree will the application generate advancements in science or evidence-based clinical practices? Is the research likely to succeed with respect to the qualifications of the research team, the design of the research, the general feasibility of the techniques employed and the environment including the availability of equipment and infrastructure?*
Research Design and Methods	*Is the design and experimental plan sound, feasible, and relevant to the questions being asked? Is the approach proposed appropriate and likely to accomplish the goals of the project? Are potential problems recognized and addressed with alternative approaches? If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for 1) protection of human subjects from research risks, and 2) inclusion of minorities and members of both sexes/genders, as well as the inclusion of children, justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed?*
Significance of Proposed Research	*How important is the science to improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields? Will the research advance basic biomedical concepts, unmet needs in human health, improve or enhance the health care system of South Africa, or contribute to health care policy or towards the development of important new products such as medicines, devices, or therapies? Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions. To what extent will the results of the project contribute to health advancements or to solving barriers to progress in the field?*
Investigator (s)	*Is the training and research experience of the project leader and collaborators appropriate for the project? Is there sufficient expertise and level of accomplishment within the research team to generate confidence in success? Is the project leader capable of leading the team to conduct the research efficiently and effectively?*
Ethical considerations	*Will human subjects be utilized in the project? If so, will they be appropriately protected from potential research risk? Is there a plan for inclusion of multiple races and ethnicities, members of both sexes/genders, and/or children? Is the inclusion/exclusion of each of these groups appropriate in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy? Will vertebrate animals be utilized in the project?* *If so, will they be appropriately and ethically treated?*

Based on the above criteria, peer reviewers will score the quality of the proposals according to the categories below and make recommendations on fundability.

Proposal quality description	Quality score
Exceptionally high-quality research that is pushing the boundaries in its field internationally while addressing highly significant scientific/health questions or challenges.	10
Research of excellent quality at the forefront in its field internationally and likely to result in high impact outcomes for science, medical practice, the health system or health policy.	9
Research of very good quality that is at the forefront nationally (and possibly internationally), addresses an important health research question and is likely to result in tangible outcomes for science, medical practice, the health system, or health policy.	8
Research of average to good quality and is likely to have a modest impact in addressing an important health research question.	5 – 7
Poor quality research with major flaws in its conceptual frameworks, research methods and design and unlikely to be successful OR research which is technically flawless, but of minimal significance, innovation, or interest could fit in this score band.	1- 4

In addition to peer review, a transformation score is applied to the proposals submitted. Proposals submitted in categories 1 (early-stage investigators) and 2 (mid-level and established researchers) will be reviewed according to the same criteria; however, ranking of proposals by score will be done against proposals within the same category only. Further, a lower cut-off score may be used for evaluation and selection of proposals in category 1.

3.) Grants Committee or Panel Review

The peer review process may include one or more Grants Committees or Review Panels that will assess the overall quality of the proposals, based on expert opinion and the peer review reports, also considering transformation imperatives and the spread of priority areas to provide a list of ranked proposals.

The panel will, where necessary, moderate scores and categorize the applications according to the categories below.

Recommendation	Score range	Rating*
Highly fundable, worth prioritizing	8 -10	A
Fundable on condition that funds are available	6-7	B
Not fundable	1-5	C

4.) Executive Management Committee approval

The outcome of the Grants Committee/Review Panel meeting(s) will be a ranked list of proposals for each category (1 and 2), which will be submitted to the SAMRC's Executive Management Committee (EMC) for final approval. The spread of awards between category 1 (early-stage investigators) and category 2 (mid-level and established researchers) and the final approved list of awardees will be at the discretion of the EMC, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Grants Committee(s) /Review Panel(s).

POPIA Statement

As of 1 July 2021, the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) came into effect. The law is designed to protect how all juristic persons use, store and process data.

The SAMRC, as a responsible statutory science council, complies with POPIA. The SAMRC will receive personal information through applications submitted to the SAMRC in response to this call. The personal information requested on the submission template is necessary for the SAMRC to fully evaluate the application. This information will be shared with external reviewers, members of Review Panels and/or Grant Committees of the SAMRC 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 as may be necessary and within the limitation and ambit of the purpose of evaluating the applications for potential 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 facilitate research and innovation 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 application 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 applying.

APPENDIX A: SELF-INITIATED RESEARCH GRANTS 2025 ONLINE REGISTRATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS

As a prospective applicant, you will need to register online in order to create a profile on the RIMS database. If you have previously registered, please log in using your existing profile rather than creating a new one. Registration in RIMS will enable you to apply for SIR grants, and your registration details (including personal information) will be automatically included in your application forms.

Basic navigation of the RIMS (Research and Innovation Management System):

Basic navigation guide.

Registration process:

Register on the SAMRC RIMS System by following the link to guide or link to video.

Application process:

Capture and submit application form by using one of the following guides:

- Detailed applicant guide or
- Summary applicant guide

Contact details: (Questions and clarifications)

Email: SIRApplications@mrc.ac.za