GRANTS INNOVATION AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

# SAMRC-RFA-SIR-2021

**CALL FOR APPLICATIONS/PROPOSALS 2021**
**SELF-INITIATED RESEARCH GRANTS (COVID-19)**

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) is pleased to announce the 2021 call 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 keeping with the SAMRC's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this call will be confined to COVID-related research. Applications with a strong focus on COVID-19 are therefore invited from all health-related disciplines and research types, including, for example, basic laboratory science, social science, clinical research, etc.

**Eligibility**

The primary target of the 2021 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 the SAMRC.

For the purposes of the SIR 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 organisation'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 in the amount of 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.

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**

All eligible applications must be submitted using the dedicated e-mail address SIRapplications@mrc.ac.za and must:

- Be signed off by the applicant
- Be approved or validated by an authorized person in the research administration office of the institution
- Reach the SAMRC by midnight on **25 June 2021** **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 co-signing applications institutions commit themselves to administering the 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 | 23 April 2021 |
| Closing date for applications | 25 June 2021 |
| Peer review process | July 2021 – October 2021 |
| Grants Committee/Review panel meeting(s) | November 2021 |
| Approval by the SAMRC's EMC | January 2022 |
| Communication of outcomes to applicants | January 2022 |
| Acceptance of SIR grants conditions by awardees | March 2022 |
| Payment of grants to institutions | April 2022 |

Application Checklist

- Completed SIR Grant application form including:
  - SIR Grant Budget Form
  - SIR Milestone Table
  - SIR Grant Reviewer Nomination Form
- Completed and signed SIR Grant Approval Form
- 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.

*Applications will not be processed until authorization by the institution has been completed. Incomplete applications and applications without an Ethics Clearance Certificate, 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 (see end of document for 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 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 a number of proposals have been unsuccessful in previous calls as a result of 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 accomplishments 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, and 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 |

Proposals submitted in categories 1 and 2 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 will be used for evaluation and selection of proposals in category 1.

3.) Grants Committee or Panel Review

Top scoring proposals in each of the categories from the peer review process will be submitted to one or more Grants Committees or Review Panels for assessment. The role of the panel(s) is to assess the overall quality of the proposals, based on their expert opinion and the peer review reports, as well as to take into consideration transformation imperatives and the spread of priority areas supported.

The panel members will score 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/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).

**Contact details:** (Questions and clarifications)

Mr Clive Glass at
Email: clive.glass@mrc.ac.za
Tel no.: +27 21-938-0225