



Framework and Application Guidelines: COVID-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund

COVID-19 Africa Rapid Grant Fund

Call Opening Date: 18 May 2020

Call Closing Date: 17 June 2020

This call covers three strands: 1) research; 2) science engagement - call to science and health journalists and communicators; and 2) science engagement - call to science advisers in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Applications from women applicants, people living with disabilities and first responders to COVID-19, as principal investigators are encouraged. In addition, diversity, including sex and gender differences, exist across all COVID-19 dimensions. Research and science engagement proposals must demonstrate considerations of diversity, including sex as a biological variable and gender as a socio-cultural factor in research projects and in science engagement approaches.

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1. Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new type of Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19 respiratory disease) a global pandemic. This pandemic presents a significant challenge that requires a global response informed by the very best scientific research. On the African continent, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), the WHO and the African Union are spearheading the continental response to COVID-19. Individual African governments have launched efforts to support prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Public funding agencies or science granting councils (SGCs) have a key role to play in facilitating responsive research and research-related activities in support of these efforts on the continent. Globally, the Global Research Council (GRC) has issued a [declaration](#) calling on participating councils to collaborate in the fight against the virus, and encourages open sharing of research findings and data. Transparency will help ensure the development of diagnostics, vaccines and prevention measures for the benefit of every nation.

Since 2015, the [Science Granting Councils Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa \(SGCI\)](#) has been implemented through collaborative efforts with fifteen (15) science granting councils in sub-Saharan Africa (most of whom participate in the GRC), [United Kingdom's Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#), [Canada's International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\)](#), [South Africa's National Research Foundation \(NRF\)](#), the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(SIDA\)](#), and the [German Research Foundation \(DFG\)](#).

With the intention to support Africa's response to COVID-19 and under the auspices of the SGCI, the NRF South Africa, IDRC, SIDA, [South Africa's Department of Science and Innovation \(DSI\)](#), [Fonds de Recherche du Québec \(FRQ\)](#), [SGCI participating councils](#), and additional partners will collaborate to implement a **Rapid Grant Fund** to address research questions and implement science engagement activities associated with COVID-19.

Researchers and science engagement practitioners from the following countries are eligible to apply: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and in the context of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Nigeria and South Africa.

- **For the Research Strand (1) and applicable only to Nigeria and South Africa, only ARUA member universities will be eligible to participate. Non-ARUA universities from South Africa and Nigeria may collaborate with ARUA members, and any other universities across the countries abovementioned to participate in this call. In the context of implementing the SGCI and to build on existing continental networks, this call is focused on ARUA universities, who through the ARUA Centres of Excellence Initiative and additional collaborative research initiatives have collectively been working together with counterparts in the ARUA network to respond to COVID-19.**
- **For the two Strands on science engagement [(2) and (3)], practitioners across all the 17 countries, and all universities, including from Nigeria and South Africa may apply.**

The **Rapid Grant Fund** is administered by NRF South Africa, and has initial total funding of **USD3.75million**, with scope for additional funding from international funders and some SGCs. A grant recipients' workshop, budgeted separately from the stipulations in this document, will be hosted after 24 months, following commencement of funded projects, to provide an opportunity for evaluation and learning amongst grant recipients and funding partners.

2. Objectives of the Rapid Grant Fund

The Rapid Grant Fund seeks to:

- Contribute to the African regional and continental response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support knowledge generation and translation to inform diagnostics, prevention and treatment of COVID-19 on the continent.
- Strengthen African regional and continental science engagement efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Leverage existing, strong multilateral collaborations in support of Africa's consolidated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and attract new collaborations from international partners.

3. Scope of the Rapid Grant Fund

The Rapid Grant Fund supports three strands in respect of research and science engagement.

3.1. Research

The Rapid Grant Fund will support knowledge generation on the increasing range of research questions on the COVID-19 pandemic. The list of research areas below is informed by what has been compiled by the [WHO](#) the [African Academy of Sciences](#) and the [Canadian 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Rapid Grant Funding Opportunity](#) :

- The COVID-19 virus: Research that investigates genetic mutation and the clinical significance of possible mutations.
- Prevention and control: Research that investigates anticipated models of spread of COVID-19; measures that have been employed on the continent, including lockdowns and their efficacy; contextual methodologies of identifying potentially infectious asymptomatic subjects on the continent considering country testing capabilities; and innovations that can address the needs of healthcare workers and care facilities, given the global lack of sufficient personal protective equipment (PPEs) and ventilators that could be developed/scaled/produced on the continent.
- African health governance system: Research that investigates facilitating factors, hindrances, and experiences on the deployment of rapid, effective and equitable interventions to prevent and respond to COVID-19; lessons from previous emerging infectious disease outbreaks on the continent and what can be applied to COVID-19; and financing mechanisms for pandemic prevention and response.
- Socio-cultural dynamics of transmission: Research that investigates how social behaviours and population movement patterns (including congested public transport) in Africa influence the risks of COVID-19 transmission within and between quarantine zones, rural/ peri-urban/urban zones, and transnational borders; how to deliver social distancing, self-quarantine, and isolation measures in high-density urban areas like informal settlements; and how migration, trade and investment, social networks and livelihoods (including in communities relying on income received daily to survive) impact transmission dynamics.
- Science engagement: Research that investigates the role and efficacy of traditional and new media in disseminating information and misinformation; effective communication strategies to counter false science and rumours in the context of scientific uncertainty and complexity; and how rumours and misinformation spread and effective measures to stop the spread of misinformation and fear on the continent.
- Mental health: Research that investigates the impact of COVID-19 on individual and community mental health, including fear, stigma, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination, and which seeks to understand evidence-based solutions to build greater community trust and prevent social conflicts.

- **Vulnerability:** Intersectional research that aims to better understand vulnerability to the coronavirus as it relates to gender, race, disability, socio-cultural demographics, income, ethnicity, concomitant non-communicable chronic diseases, and other elements of marginalization; and how to best protect vulnerable groups from the intense periods of COVID-19 transmission.

Project proposals must include the following information and must not exceed ten (10) pages:

- a. A clearly articulated research focus guided by the research areas abovementioned.
- b. Specific research objectives and methodology.
- c. Expected knowledge outputs and outcomes for the two-year period.
- d. Expected potential impact of knowledge outputs.
- e. Expected human capital contributions, with explicit gender considerations.
- f. Research dissemination/communication considerations for the public and key stakeholder groups.
- g. A description of how the research content will be ethical, inclusive and gender-sensitive or gender-responsive.
- h. Indications of collaborations within the same institution, between institutions within a country, between and amongst institutions on the continent and beyond Africa. Collaborations with non-academic partners (private sector and the not-for profit sector) can also be indicated. Collaborations are not limited to the eligible countries.
- i. Implementation timeline for proposed activities.
- j. A detailed research budget.

In addition, the following must also be submitted:

- k. The Curriculum Vitae of the designated lead Principal Investigator (PI).
- l. A letter of support from the head of the lead PI's applicant institution, (i.e. Letter from DVC Research, VC of institution or equivalent head). The letter should specify the nature and level of support expected from the institution in terms of technical, financial and administrative contribution towards the project resources.
- m. With the exception of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and South Africa, a letter of support from the respective SGCI participating council. The letter of support should confirm alignment of the proposal with the national COVID-19 Response, where applicable. In addition, the letter should undertake to support the implementation and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of the research project in collaboration with the applicant institution. The letter should clearly indicate defined roles, including enabling researchers and applicant institutions to fulfil the applicable national ethics regulations by facilitating issuance of research permits and material transfer agreements to international collaborative research projects as needed for projects involving transboundary transfer of research materials.
- n. A list of up to six (6) recommended external, independent reviewers.

The following applies regarding the call for research projects:

- a. Research proposals will be eligible from teams of researchers in higher education institutions, science councils (quasi-governmental agencies undertaking research activities, such as the medical research councils) and research institutes in any of the [SGCI participating countries](#) (see table 1). With exception, only applicants from universities part of the [African Research Universities Alliance](#) (ARUA) will be considered in South Africa and Nigeria (see table 2). **Non-ARUA universities from South Africa and Nigeria may collaborate with ARUA members, and any other universities across the countries abovementioned to participate in this call. In the context of implementing the SGCI and to build on existing continental networks, this call is focused on ARUA universities, who through the ARUA Centres of Excellence Initiative and additional collaborative research initiatives have collectively been working together with counterparts in the ARUA network to respond to COVID-19.**

- b. The lead PI (i.e. the applicant) must be an active researcher, who will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as scientific and financial reporting. The lead PI must be in possession of a PhD with a minimum of five (5) years of active full-time research experience at the time of application.
- c. Research grants will only be made to the lead PI's institution.
- d. The maximum amount per grant for a maximum period of 2 years is USD100 000.
- e. In accordance with the Open Access Policy for IDRC-Funded Project Outputs, which can be found on <https://www.idrc.ca/en/open-access-policy-idrc-funded-project-outputs>, all project outputs must be made available to the public on an Open Access basis:
 - Books, data and journal articles generated by the grantees and sub-grantees of funded projects will be made accessible free of charge to the end user;
 - Authors are encouraged to publish their books open access and their articles in open access journals. If this is not possible, the published books or articles must be uploaded to an open access repository within 12 months of publication;
 - All project outputs identified above will be made freely and openly available under the most recent version of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence; and
 - Research proposals submitted must include an open access dissemination plan.
- f. Research grants are to be primarily used for research purposes.
 - The following activities will be supported:
 - **Research-related operating costs** - activities to be supported may include expenses relating to conducting research such as field work (e.g. conducting interviews), mobility costs, small equipment (up to 15% of total budget), time for research assistants, consumables and accessories, and publication related costs.
 - **Knowledge sharing costs** - in support of project-related activities, such as joint workshops, seminars, conferences, symposia, lecturer presentations, meetings, local and regional dissemination of results to relevant stakeholders.
 - The following will **NOT** be funded:
 - Consultant's fees
 - Project management fees
 - Educational expenses (scholarships and/or bursaries)
 - Large equipment
 - Basic office equipment including computers and consumables
 - Salaries.

3.2. Science Engagement: Call to science and health journalists and communicators

The Rapid Grant Fund will support communities of science journalists and communicators on the African continent, including multi-country collaborations, in efforts to produce and disseminate coordinated science communication outputs that will allow readers access to factual information and analysis to inform their actions and challenge misinformation. Communities of science journalists and communicators may submit proposals that cover topics including:

- Evidence-based lessons and best practice for science communication, education and awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evidence-based lessons and best practice for the practice of journalism, ethics, and coverage regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evidence-based lessons and best practice from previous experiences, such as the Ebola outbreak, on managing the COVID-19 pandemic and using different media outlets to reach disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

- Building online collaborative platforms for science journalists and communicators in support of disseminating coordinated science communication outputs.
- Investigations on preparedness of health systems in Africa for the COVID-19 epidemic.
- Support discussions on the state of the public health system to deal with emerging infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.
- Synthesis of existing research and research activities on COVID-19 for public consumption, using various media.
- Reporting on the use and adaptation of emerging practices on the continent and internationally to support diagnostics, prevention and treatment of COVID-19.
- Reporting on the use and adaptation of indigenous knowledge systems to support diagnostics, prevention and treatment of COVID-19.
- Coverage of inspiring public health experts, scientists, researchers, activists, and leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic to reach hard to reach communities with facts and public health information.
- Developing media content focusing on the socio-cultural experiences of the African public, for example, investigations covering stigma, discrimination, inequality and access.
- Developing media content on public health data that can be accessed by a wide variety of communities.
- Developing media reporting on the socio-economic, political and cultural impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evaluation of media messaging, false news, audience engagement across different media channels in multiple countries.

Funds could cover activities such as developing and disseminating communication material with accurate research information, facts, figures, and a list of experts to speak with; journalists spending time with research groups to understand their work; networking sessions between local science journalists and researchers, as feasible; media and science communication training for researchers on the continent; support for innovative local projects designed to boost science engagement and meet the needs of local communities; and operating costs related to COVID-19 coverage, for example, technology that enables remote working.

Proposals must include the following information and must not exceed eight (8) pages:

- a. A clearly articulated science engagement or science journalism approach, including how the grant will support this, guided by proposed abovementioned topics.
- b. Description of the intended audience to be engaged and the expected reach of the defined approach.
- c. Clear indication of medium of communication to be used.
- d. Description of collaborations (within countries, amongst countries on the continent, and beyond Africa).
- e. A description of how gender and diversity will be considered in the implementation of proposed topics, including in reporting.
- f. Implementation timeline for proposed activities and the methods to be followed in project reporting.
- g. At least 3 recent (i.e. in the last 12 months) outputs (works) covering health, and specifically disease prevention, control, management and treatment. These could be recent published work or communication outputs by featured individual science journalists and communicators.
- h. A detailed budget.
- i. Brief bios of featured individual science journalists and communicators to indicate past experience in science engagement or science journalism.

In addition, the following should also be submitted:

- a. The Curriculum Vitae of the designated lead Principal Investigator (PI).

- b. A letter of support from the head of the lead PI's applicant institution (i.e. CEO/ Chief Editor or equivalent head). The letter should specify the nature and level of support expected from the institution in terms of technical, financial and administrative contribution towards the project resources.

The following applies regarding the call to science communicators and science journalists:

- a. Proposals will be eligible from organisations representing the communities of journalists and communicators that cover science, technology and health, including national editorial and journalist forums or associations.
- b. Eligible applicant organisations should serve citizens in the following countries: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and/or Nigeria. **Science engagement practitioners across all the 17 countries, including Nigeria and South Africa may apply.**
- c. An application must designate a PI, who will bear the main responsibility for the project, including its technical and administrative coordination as well as scientific and financial reporting. PI's may be science or health journalists, media communicators, press officers and communication officers of agencies and institutions active in science communication.
- d. PI's must demonstrate at least five (5) years working experience in science/health communication or science/health journalism. If the application involves multi-country collaborations, the PI must show experience in having done two prior projects with multi-country collaborations.
- e. PI's will be required to liaise with the respective SGC, as applicable, on the implementation and M&E aspects of the project.
- f. Funds will not be made available to individuals and for-profit entities.
- g. No funds may be used to support political activities. Detailed reporting on the use of funds will be required.
- h. Funding will be considered for proposals that support a minimum of three (3) of the above-mentioned topics and approaches.
- i. All organizations that receive a grant must make the coverage or products they produce with these funds freely available to the public and, where appropriate, registered under an open access license.
- j. The maximum amount per grant for a maximum period of 18 months is USD20 000.

3.3. Science Engagement: Call to science advisers

The Rapid Grant Fund will support national African academies of science, African national Young Academies of Science and the [INGSA Africa](#) chapter to provide rapid science advice in support of regional and continental responses to COVID-19. Applicants may submit proposals that cover topics including:

- Convening experts from various African countries for coordinated regional and continental responses to COVID-19, using multiple media platforms.
- Supporting science advisory efforts that seek to use credible and trustworthy sources of scientific evidence on COVID-19, including strategies for knowledge translation and policymaking in the context of scientific uncertainty.
- Hosting tele-convenings to provide and inform the public on the latest scientific evidence on COVID-19.
- Compiling a multidisciplinary database of experts, leveraging the honorific function of academies of science across the continent that could be called upon to support governments, regional communities and the African Union in efforts to fight COVID-19.
- Identifying gaps in knowledge and practice on the continent in support of efforts to fight COVID-19.

- Foresighting to identify areas for future investments in research and innovation regarding emerging infectious diseases.

Proposals must include the following information and must not exceed eight (8) pages:

- a. A clearly articulated science advisory focus, including how the grant will support this, guided by the topics abovementioned.
- b. Description of the policymaker audience to be targeted and advisory mechanisms/ approaches to be used.
- c. Description of collaborations (within countries, amongst countries on the continent, and beyond Africa).
- d. Indicative outputs and concomitant dissemination plans.
- e. A description of how gender and diversity will be considered in the implementation of proposed topics.
- f. Implementation timeline for proposed activities.
- g. At least 3 recent (i.e. in the last 2 years) advisory engagements covering the domain of health, including the approaches undertaken to include uptake by policymakers.
- h. Brief bios of featured experts to engage in proposed advisory activities.
- i. A detailed budget.

In addition, the following should be submitted:

- j. The Curriculum Vitae of the designated lead Principal Investigator (PI).
- k. A letter of support from the head of the lead PI's applicant institution (i.e. president/ executive officer/ executive secretary/ director general). The letter should specify the nature and level of support expected from the institution in terms of technical, financial and administrative contribution towards the project resources.
- l. With the exception of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and South Africa, a letter of support from the respective SGCI participating council. The letter of support should undertake to support the implementation and M&E of the project in collaboration with the applicant institution, as applicable.

The following applies regarding the call to science advisers:

- a. Proposals will only be eligible from national African academies of science, national African Young Academies of Science and the INGSA Africa chapter.
- k. Eligible applicant organisations should serve citizens in the following countries: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and/or Nigeria. **National academies of science and national Young Academies of Science across all the 17 countries, including Nigeria and South Africa may apply.**
- b. The PI must be in possession of a PhD or equivalent with proven track record in engaging in science advisory activities for at least three (3) years at the time of application.
- c. Projects must NOT be for any form of scientific research.
- d. Funds will not be made to individuals. No funds may be used to support political activities.
- e. Funding will be considered for proposals that support a minimum of two (2) of the above-mentioned topics.
- f. The maximum amount per grant for a maximum period of 24 months is USD50 000.
- g. All organizations that receive a grant must make the coverage or products they produce with these funds freely available to the public and, where appropriate, registered under an open access license.

4. Application, Review and Selection Process

The following applies regarding the application, review and selection process:

4.1. Application

- Applications must be submitted on the **NRF Online Submission System** at <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>. Applications should be submitted in English or French.
- Incomplete applications and applications received after the closing date will not be considered for funding.
- Only one application per PI can be submitted across all three strands i.e. a PI cannot apply to more than one strand.

4.2. Review and Evaluation

- Peer review (research projects) and evaluation (science engagement proposals) will be conducted in accordance with NRF policy, and in recognition of the rapid response nature of this funding opportunity
- The following will be considered during peer review and evaluation:
 - Quality of proposal: extent to which the application responds to the fund scope; quality of the proposed approach/methods, and appropriate integration of gender and diversity considerations (diversity of the team and in the design and content/approach); expected outputs and outcomes; and appropriateness of the budget and justification for amount requested.
 - Track record of applicants: expertise and experience of individuals or organisations involved in the project; and composition, integration and complementary roles of team members.
 - Potential impact of proposed activities: timeliness of planned activities; quality of dissemination activities, including plans for collaborating with relevant organisations; and potential contribution to regional and continental efforts to understand or respond to COVID-19.
- The NRF will apply the following weights to the three categories: Quality of project: 50%; Quality of Applicants: 25%; and Impact of the Research: 25% to generate a final score.
- Each proposal will be assessed by a minimum of three (3) external reviewers and evaluators, who will assign a numerical score for each of the three categories of peer review and evaluation as abovementioned. Scores will range from 1 (poor quality) to 5 (excellent quality).
- All applicants will receive communication of the outcome of the reviews and evaluation process. However, and due to the rapid nature of the call, the NRF will not provide detailed feedback to all applicants.
- There will not be an appeals process regarding the outcomes of the peer review and evaluation process.

4.3. Selection

Funding decisions in the three strands will be made in consideration of the following:

- a. Peer review and evaluation outcome
- b. Geographical and linguistic balance
- c. Gender and diversity considerations (diversity in distribution of funds considering women applicants, people living with disabilities and first responders to COVID-19, as principal investigators). Diversity in teams and in proposed content/approach will be taken into consideration as part of (a) above.
- d. The Rapid Grant Fund will be allocated as follows across the three strands:
 - Research Strand (70% of Fund)
 - Science engagement: Call to science and health journalists and communicators (20% of Fund)
 - Science engagement: Call to science advisers (10% of Fund)

NRF Conditions of Grant will have to be signed by successful applicants, and will govern the grant administration process, including reporting requirements.

5. Contacts

For programme/content related queries:

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Table 1: SGCI participating councils

Country	Science Granting Council	Contact person	Contact Email
Botswana	Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology		
Burkina Faso	Le fonds National pour la Recherche et de l'Innovation pour le Développement		
Côte d'Ivoire	Programme d'Appui Stratégique à la Recherche Scientifique		
Ethiopia	Ministry of Innovation and Technology		
Ghana	Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation		
Kenya	National Research Fund		
Malawi	National Commission for Science and Technology		
Mozambique	Fundo Nacional de Investigação		
Namibia	National Commission on Research, Science and Technology		
Rwanda	National Council for Science and Technology		
Senegal	Le Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche		
Tanzania	Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology		
Uganda	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology		
Zambia	National Science and Technology Council		

Zimbabwe	Research Council of Zimbabwe		
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Table 2: African Research Universities Alliance Member Universities

Country	Science Granting Council
Nigeria	University of Lagos
	University of Ibadan
	Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife
South Africa	University of Cape Town
	University of the Witwatersrand
	University of Stellenbosch
	University of Pretoria
	Rhodes University
	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

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