



Frequently Asked Questions

General

How many applications will be funded?

It is anticipated that at least four awards will be made in the first instance.

Which is more important: research, or research capacity strengthening?

Whilst capacity strengthening is a central element of the call, reviewers will consider first and foremost the quality, relevance and innovation of research proposals. Proposals should aim to undertake research to further scientific understanding of and enhance readiness and resilience to epidemics and pandemics in Africa.

What is the role of the University of Oxford's Pandemic Sciences Institute?

The Pandemic Sciences Institute (PSI) is partnering with the Science for Africa Foundation to release the call. There is no requirement to include PSI in applications.

Eligibility

Is the call open to all regions of Africa?

Yes.

Can applications be submitted by individuals or single organisations?

No, this is a call for consortia. Each consortium must include a minimum of three organisations.

Are existing grantees of SFA Foundation awards eligible to apply?

Yes.

How are 'research institutions' defined?

These include organisations undertaking basic and/or applied research and which are not-for-profit. These may include, for example, universities, research institutions, NGOs, or non-academic healthcare organisations.

For the purposes of the call, what does 'based in Africa' mean?

This refers to organisations whose primary research location is in Africa, even if their offices are registered elsewhere. International organisations with registered offices in Africa are also eligible institutions. It is expected that the lead applicant will hold their primary affiliation at an institution whose primary research location is in Africa and that they are based in Africa for the majority of their time.



Do lead applicants need to have attained a certain level of seniority?

We are looking for strong Principal Investigators with innovative ideas for high-quality research proposals who can build an effective collaborative network. Early and mid-career researchers are eligible as lead applicants, although it is expected that they will hold an academic post (or a commitment of one if the grant is awarded).

Can the lead applicant be based at an African institution but employed by a non-African (e.g. European or US) institution?

No.

Can there be more than one lead applicant?

No, there must be only one lead applicant. Other named individuals from partner institutions would be included as co-applicants.

How many co-applicants are allowed per partner institution?

Each partner institution should host one named co-applicant. The online application form allows a maximum of 6 co-applicants who should be matched to each of the listed partner institutions.

Consortia formation

What is the maximum number of institutions that a consortium may include?

As per the call guidance, each consortium may include the lead institution plus up to five partner institutions (between whom the budget will be shared). There is no limit on the number of collaborating institutions (who will not receive any budget), but applicants are advised to carefully consider the number of collaborating institutions to ensure that consortia remain manageable.

Can consortia include private sector organisations?

Yes. Private sector organisations should be included as collaborating institutions (who do not receive any budget).

Can consortia include non-African institutions, including from Europe and the US?

Yes. As per the call guidance, applicants may (but do not have to) include a maximum of three partner institutions from outside Africa. The total funds to be allocated to partner institutions outside Africa cannot exceed 10% of the total application budget.

There is no limit on the number of collaborating institutions (who will not receive any budget), but applicants are advised to carefully consider the number to ensure that consortia remain manageable.

Can all institutions within a consortium be based in the same country?

In principle, yes: there is no minimum number of countries required per application. As per the call guidance, however, research institutions that are generally recognised to be strong or high-performing will be required to pair with institutions across countries and regions where there is a clear need for research capacity-strengthening.



Are new or recently established consortia eligible to apply?

Yes, applications from new or recently established consortia are eligible.

Can consortia include government ministries, funders, and UN agencies?

Yes, but as collaborating institutions (who do not receive budgets). They may be included as partner institutions in exceptional circumstances, in which case clear justification should be provided.

Thematic areas

Will all thematic areas be considered equally?

Reviewers will consider first and foremost the quality, relevance, and innovation of research proposals, although a balance between thematic areas will be sought as far as possible.

Can applications consider more than one thematic area?

Applicants must select one primary thematic area on the preliminary application form. However, applications which incorporate interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives are encouraged.

Is there a preference for basic or implementation research?

Reviewers will consider first and foremost the quality, relevance, and innovation of research proposals. There is no preference for primary or translational research.

Will applications that focus only on epidemics (and not pandemics) be considered?

Yes, as long as the research programme has demonstrated relevance to broader pandemic preparedness or pandemic research preparedness.

Budgets

Can budgets include a portion of the salary of the lead applicant?

Yes. The call guidelines advise that the apportionment of salaries included in applications should be proportional to the level of effort of the personnel included. Please refer to the budget guideline section of the guidance document for more information about allowable costs.

Can an application include budget for postgraduate courses such as MSc, MPH and PhD?

Yes, although reviewers will consider first and foremost the quality, relevance and innovation of research proposals. Postgraduate training would need to demonstrate direct relevance to the proposed research programme, and a commitment to sustainable research careers.



Are infrastructure and/or capital investment costs eligible?

Yes, although applicants should adhere to their institutional policies when classifying costs as direct or indirect. All direct costs should clearly support the quality, relevance and innovation of research proposals. The applicant should also note the limitation that indirect costs cannot be charged on capital assets over USD \$1,000 per unit.

Are operational costs (such as data managers or grant accountants) eligible?

Yes, although applicants should adhere to their institutional policies when classifying costs as direct or indirect. All direct costs should clearly support the quality, relevance and innovation of research proposals.

Are institutional operating costs eligible?

As per the call guidance, indirect costs at a maximum rate of 10% of all direct costs may be included. The calculation for indirect costs should be supported by appropriate institutional evidence as a percentage or a breakdown of individual costs / activities.

Indirect costs cannot be charged on capital assets over USD \$1,000 per unit.

Is it mandatory to include the additional budgetary elements (catalyst grants, research and innovation fellowships, EPSILON exchange awards)?

Yes, up to the budgetary cap that is specified per element as per the call guidance. These should be costed separately to the core funding of up to USD \$4m. Further information about these elements will be provided to those consortia that are invited to submit full applications.

Are lead institutions expected to provide co-funding?

Although co-funding is not a prerequisite for EPSILON grants, if the lead or partner institutions are able to provide monetary or non-monetary (space, equipment, protected time for research) contributions, this should be included in the application and/or stated clearly in the letter of support. As per the call guidance it is also anticipated that successful consortia will attract additional funding from other sources over the duration of the programme.

How will funding flow from SFA Foundation to each consortium?

SFA Foundation will award funds directly to the lead institution. As per the call guidance, the lead institution will be responsible for overall funds management, accountability and reporting on behalf of the consortium. In exceptional circumstances alternative funding arrangements may be considered.

Submission and timelines

Who should sign the letter of institutional support? Is there a standard template for this letter?

The letter of institutional support should ideally be signed by an authorised approver in the lead applicant's institution. There is no specified template for this letter, but it should be specific about the nature of support that shall be available to the consortium from the lead institution.



When will shortlisted applicants be notified?

As per the call guidance, shortlisted applicants will be invited during the first half of April 2024 to submit full applications, for which the deadline is likely to be in June 2024.