

Being Initiative

Call for Applications:
Guidance Notes



ScienceforAfricaFoundation



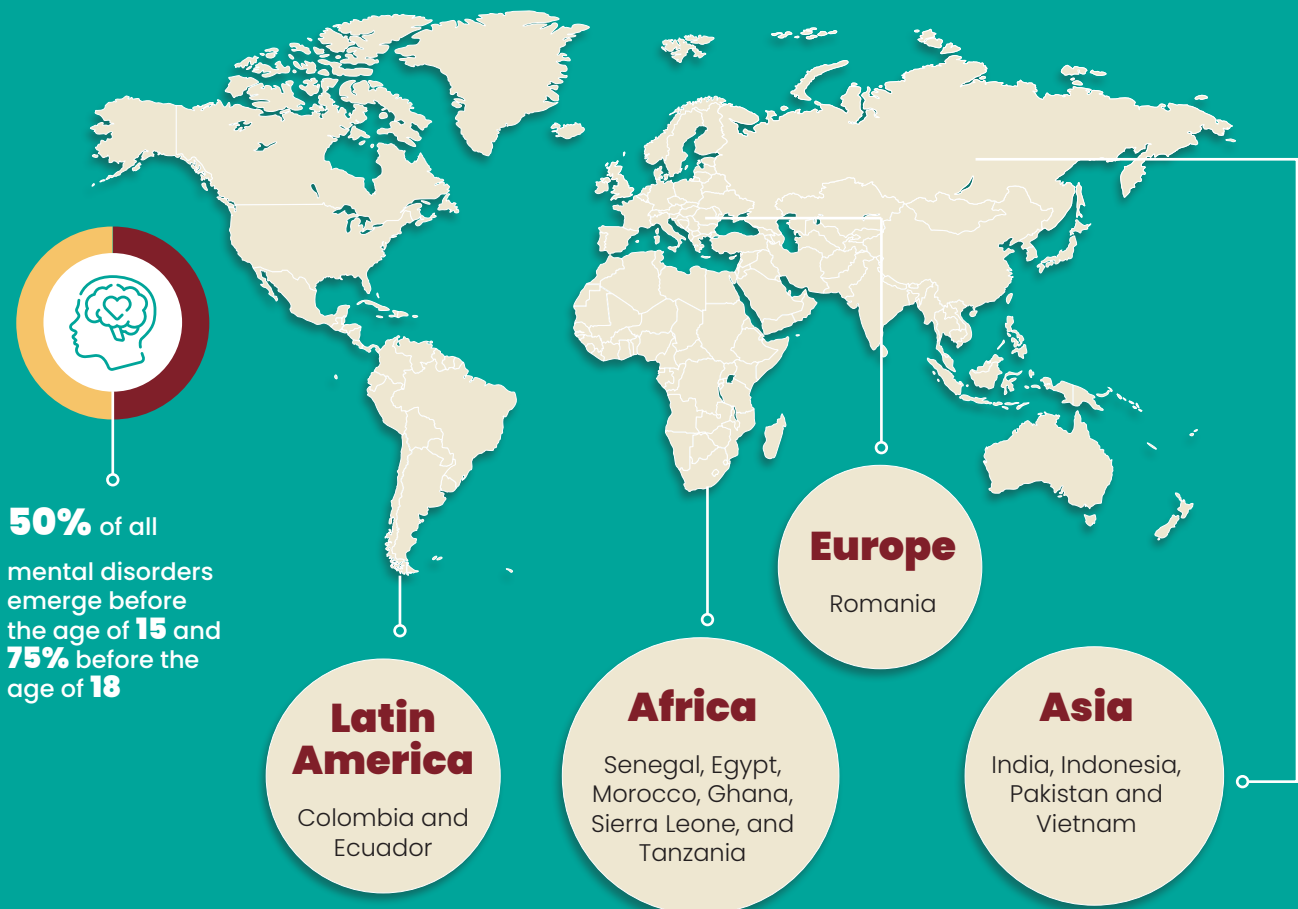
Background

Youth represents a critical period of life when brain circuitry is particularly vulnerable to environmental, physiological and psychological stressors that may disrupt the architecture of the developing brain, culminating in the emergence of mental illness. Current estimates suggest that approximately 50% of all mental disorders emerge before the age of 15 and 75% before the age of 18. Notably, suicide is the second leading cause of death globally for adolescents and young people between 15 and 29. As such, mental health conditions constitute a major burden of disease among adolescents and youth globally. It follows that successful diagnosis and early intervention of major mental disorders in young

people (e.g., psychosis, anxiety disorders, depression) will alleviate and perhaps even prevent lifelong detrimental consequences in terms of personal, family, economic, and societal cost.

The Science for Africa Foundation (SFA Foundation) is embarking on a crucial initiative to identify and address the most salient stressors affecting the mental health and overall wellbeing of youth in selected countries across Africa (Senegal, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania), Latin America (Colombia and Ecuador), Asia (India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Vietnam), and Romania.

Initiative Selected Countries



Being Initiative

Introduction

The Being initiative, launched in October 2022, is an international mental health initiative focused on funding and supporting research and innovative approaches that improve the mental wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 24 in low- and middle-income countries (LAMICs). Specifically, this initiative focuses on preventive and promotive strategies to improve youth mental health and wellbeing via research, ecosystem engagement and innovation.

Vision and Mission



Vision

While there is evidence showing that diverse stressors encountered during youth can impact mental health, knowledge remains fragmented in relation to the biological, psychological, and social mechanisms of action underpinning how and why distinct stressors may impact mental health differently. Also, an appreciation of how these stressors may interact with one another to impact mental health among youth represents another important knowledge gap. Understanding these aspects is crucial as they will provide information we need to identify key biopsychosocial mechanisms underlying mental health problems—affecting youth—and their subsequent treatment. Without an understanding of how and why stressors impact youth mental health, it is much more difficult to develop new and improved early interventions and to target them to the right people at the right time.

Building a fresh knowledge base around stressors that affect young people's mental health, in the most contexts—particularly LAMICs—will inform the development of new and improved prevention and early interventions in addition to generating actionable policy recommendations geared towards youth mental health and wellbeing.



Mission

This call will foster a vibrant ecosystem of **Being Networks** across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Romania. Each Being network will comprise at least three (3) institutions in a 'hub and spoke' consortium and will develop into an established network of research excellence focused on the analysis of emerging stressors relevant to youth mental health and wellbeing.










Definitions

Term	Definition
Co-applicant	Named individuals who represent institutional partners
Collaborating institution	Institution that supports delivery of the research objectives, but which will not receive any budget.
Consortium	A group of at least three (3) institutions, one lead institution and at least 2 partner institutions, collaborating to respond to this grant call. A consortium can consist of a maximum of 5 institutions, one lead institution and at most 4 partner institutions.
Lead applicant	Principal Investigator who is based at the lead institution.
Lead institution	Institution that is leading and coordinating the application and where the lead applicant is based. Funds will be granted to this institution.
Partner institution	An institution that will carry out a well-defined element of work and which will receive a budget from the lead institution.
Priority country	One of the 13 priority low- and middle-income countries supported by the Being Initiative that includes: Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Romania, Tanzania and Vietnam.

Call for Applications

The Science for Africa Foundation invites applications for innovative research geared towards addressing youth mental health and wellbeing. Applications should take into consideration pressing local, national and regional research priorities, resources and current environments. Specifically, we are looking to fund **longitudinal primary research** focused on identifying and addressing knowledge gaps related to the impact of **emerging stressors** on youth mental health and that actively involve the participation of young people (i.e., in terms of conducting the research and in the governance

of the projects). The research should also encompass the urban/peri-urban context in relation to the impact of stressors on young people's mental wellbeing. Research should be broadly associated to one of the stressors listed below. Transdisciplinary and systems level research is encouraged, and applicants should outline how they might draw upon a breadth of expertise within their proposed programme. This call does **NOT** fund **implementation research**. We emphasise that we are looking for visionary consortia which will develop their own programmes of relevant research work.

Personal Stressors*					*Represent stressors experienced at the individual level.	
	Education expectations (Academic pursuit)	Substance abuse and digital addiction	Poverty	Childhood trauma		
	Societal Stressors**					**Sources of social stress that generate 'differences' among groups of people.
		Stigma	Violence and conflicts	Bullying (including cyber bullying)		
Environmental Stressors***				***Are stressors that involve an interdependent relationship between living beings and their immediate environment.		
	Media	Climate change				

The list of stressors included in the above figures is provided to stimulate your thinking and was generated through a group discussion exercise (viz., nominal group technique) involving a panel of mental health experts from LAMICs who were asked to identify and rank what they considered to be the most pressing emerging stressors affecting youth mental health. We are open to and interested in receiving proposals covering the stressor(s) that you deem to be the most promising for

addressing youth mental health in relation to any of the priority LAMICs (Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Vietnam). Ultimately, our aim is to identify the relevant stressors and their impact on mental health. It is expected that all projects must describe the relevant ethical, social and cultural implications of their proposed work.

Call for Applications



A. Summary Guidance to Applicants:

Applicants shall be required to address one primary stressor drawn from the list above, and at most three (3) secondary stressors linked to the primary stressor.

Transdisciplinary research is encouraged, and projects may explore how different contexts/ cultures (i.e., cross-national aspects of the consortium) impact the effects of the stressor(s) under investigation across more than one scientific discipline to address the proximal and distal influences of stressors on youth mental health (e.g., in relation to anxiety or depression).

In addition, a systems level approach to research is encouraged through which applicants select a stressor from each one of the distinct stress clusters (i.e., personal, societal and environmental domains) connecting the various selected stressors to their research vision.

This is a two-stage call for application: -

- a) Preliminary applications – Open call to submit a high-level concept note for review.
- b) Full applications – Closed call for applications that are highly rated during the preliminary application stage.



B. Countries of Interest

The specific countries of interest for this call are Senegal, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Vietnam and Romania.



C. Call Details

Applications are invited from universities, research institutions, community-based organisations and for-profit institutions. Applicants should prepare a core budget of **USD \$2.4 million** for up to **3.5 years (42 months)**.

Applicants will be required to demonstrate that their proposed research is aligned to country and/or regional needs and priorities. This is because successful consortia will be expected to deliver a mix of discovery, translational and applied research. Applicants should demonstrate that they are meeting a need identified through wider stakeholder and community engagement. At the full application stage applicants will be required to solicit strong letters of support from beyond the applicant institutions e.g. from Ministries of Health, policy think tanks, or scientific, economic and social commissions with advisory roles to governments.

Applications are particularly encouraged from consortia whose component institutions:

- Strongly support and commit to safeguarding.
- Foster diverse workplaces and environments.
- Balance scientific excellence with equity (disciplines, sectors, regions, institutional capacity) when selecting partner and collaborating institutions and in their recruitment of staff and students.
- Demonstrate policies to achieve value for money, manage risk, and build strong research cultures and environments.

Applications Process

Applications must be submitted online via the SFA Foundation Grants Agaseke Management System (Agaseke GMS) at <https://agaseke.scienceforafrica.foundation/Login.aspx>. Applications submitted through email or via any other means shall be deemed ineligible. Application forms, guidance notes and links to other relevant documents are available online at <https://scienceforafrica.foundation/funding>.

Key dates:

Feb 22 2024	Preliminary calls for applications open
Feb 29 2024	Webinar and match making forum
April 19 2024	Preliminary call for applications close at 17h00 East Africa Time
June 5 2024	Full application window opens
July 31 2024	Full application window closes at 17h00 East Africa Time
November 2024	Final grantees issued with conditional awards
March 2025	Final awards/Start of Research



Eligibility



A. Lead Applicant Eligibility

Definition: Principal Investigator who is based at the lead institution.

Lead applicants can apply to lead only one application but could be co-applicants in several applications. They must be from an eligible institution (i.e., having legal status) and must fulfil the following conditions: -

- Be a national or a resident of a priority country including Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Romania, Indonesia or Morocco.
- Hold an academic or research post.
- Have a salary, or the guarantee of a salary, for the duration of the award period, or be required by their contract of employment to have a salary.
- Where an applicant does not currently have a post at the lead institution/partner institution, then they are also eligible to apply if they have a written guarantee of a post which, if the application is successful, they would take up by the start of the award.
- Be a senior, early-career, mid-career, and established researchers.
- May be from disciplines not typically associated with mental health science (e.g. beyond psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience).



B. Co-applicant Eligibility

Definition: Named individuals who represent institutional partners.

- At least two (2) co-applicants should have a primary affiliation to the partner institution that is based in one of the 13 priority countries.
- Additional co-applicants can be drawn from any country in the globe.
- Must be established research leaders of international stature as demonstrated through a track record of leading on and supporting high quality research in the mental health field, through a strong publication record.
- Be based at the partner institution for the duration of the grant and be able to take responsibility for leading the overall management of the programme, if awarded.



C. Lead Institution Eligibility

Definition: Lead Institution: This is an institution that is leading and coordinating the application and where the lead applicant is based. Funds will be granted to this institution.

- Must be based in the following countries: Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Romania, Indonesia or Morocco.
- Must be legally viable.
- Should be universities, research institutions, community-based organisations and for-profit institutions.

Eligibility



D. Partner Institution Eligibility

Definition: An institution that will carry out a well-defined element of work and which will receive a budget from the lead institution.

- At least two (2) partner institutions must be based in the following countries: Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Romania, Indonesia or Morocco.
- Must be legally viable.
- Should be universities, research institutions, community-based organisations and for-profit institutions.



E. Collaborating Institution Eligibility

Definition: Institution that supports delivery of the research objectives, but which will not receive any budget.

- Could be based in any country in the globe.
- Must be legally viable.
- Can be any type of institution.



G. Consortium Eligibility

Definition: A group of at least three (3) institutions, one lead institution and at least 2 partner institutions, collaborating to respond to the Being call.

- Lead applicant and institution must be based in the following countries: Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Romania, Vietnam, Indonesia or Morocco.
- Refer to section d) above for the co-applicant and partner institution eligibility.
- Should be a minimum of three (3) institutions and a maximum of five (5) institutions, in both cases including the lead institution.

Review and Selection



At the preliminary application stage, selection criteria will include the boldness and novelty of the proposal, potential outcomes and impacts of the proposed research and the quality of the lead applicant and proposed consortium.

Full application review criteria shall include but may not be limited to:

- Rationale of proposed research, including alignment with and relevance to national, regional and international strategic objectives.
- Quality and innovation in research objectives.
- Experience and/or qualifications of the lead applicant and co-applicants.
- Suitability of the research environment.
- Mainstreaming of gender, equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Sustainability and value for money
- The proposed use of funds: costs requested should be for the direct costs of the research and be reasonably justified in line with the work plan.
- Feasibility: Ability to successfully carry out the proposed project with resources and facilities available to applicant/s.
- Strategies for balancing excellence with equity in recruitment and selection of partners, staff and fellows.
- Strategies for identifying and documenting impact.
- Potential for proposed research programme to result in transformational change in youth mental health and wellbeing e.g. policy change, improved practices, community-based interventions, innovations, change in societal attitudes etc.
- A clear focus on embedding patient (viz, youth with lived experience of mental health conditions) and public engagement in their proposed research programme through genuine and meaningful partnership with patients and the public in design, delivery and dissemination of research.
- Involvement of policymakers.

The full assessment criteria will involve:

- Research question(s) and strength of proposed methodology (25%).
- Suitability and expertise of the team (25%).
- Involvement of youth with lived experience (25%).
- Structure of delivery of the project (e.g., dissemination plan and public engagement) (25%).

Consortia Formation and Management



Balancing excellence with equity

Further to the stated consortia eligibility criteria, applicants are encouraged to take note of the following:

- Single institution applications will NOT be accepted. To achieve a measure of equity and to improve capacity in the relevant field, without compromising scientific excellence, 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.
- Applicants are advised to carefully consider the number of partner institutions and collaborating institutions to build manageable consortia in proportion to the work plan and budget. There will be no limits on the number of collaborating institutions, but applications should indicate how many are included, where they are based, and their specific and sectoral knowledge contribution.
- Given the need to strengthen pathways to, and evaluate, impacts it is strongly recommended that applicants identify at least one knowledge broker/partner, think tank, or a consortium advisory board whose membership includes policy specialists and thought leaders, community stakeholders etc. These individuals will provide important guidance to the consortium on knowledge translation, linkages with governments and communities, and will help bridge gaps among research, policy and practice.



Diversity and inclusion

Whilst the quality of proposed research will be the most important selection criterion, leadership by women and young researchers is particularly encouraged, in both lead and co-applicant roles. Upon award, recruitment of staff and students will also be monitored to seek gender parity and equity (individuals and research topics). Applicants **MUST** select partner/collaborating institutions and plan to recruit staff/students from diverse cultural backgrounds across the 13 countries of interest, considering variation in geography, regional spread and economic status.



Programme strategy and management

In addition to the relevant strategic area(s), successful consortia must have a defined scientific research strategy that is relevant to national and/or regional mental health and/or non-health research, socio-economic, environmental and sustainable development priorities. Consortia should capitalise on the existing strengths of institutional partners to collectively and synergistically strengthen Africa's research ecosystems.

Successful consortia will need to implement robust internal programme governance and management and should consider long-term sustainability. Lead applicants will need to undertake programme and partner risk assessments and must demonstrate management processes and systems, strong financial governance and controls, documented standard operating protocols, and programme monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks. Equally important will be strategies for monitoring, documenting and reporting short-term, medium-term and long-term impact stories arising from priority research being undertaken by the consortium, and the ability to leverage these for advocacy and policy change objectives.

Consortia Formation and Management



Letters of support

Where indicated in the application form at preliminary and full application stages, applications must be accompanied by letters of support from senior institutional leadership (e.g. Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Directors of Research) at all lead and partner institutions. At preliminary application stage, only a letter of institutional support from the lead institution will be required.



Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

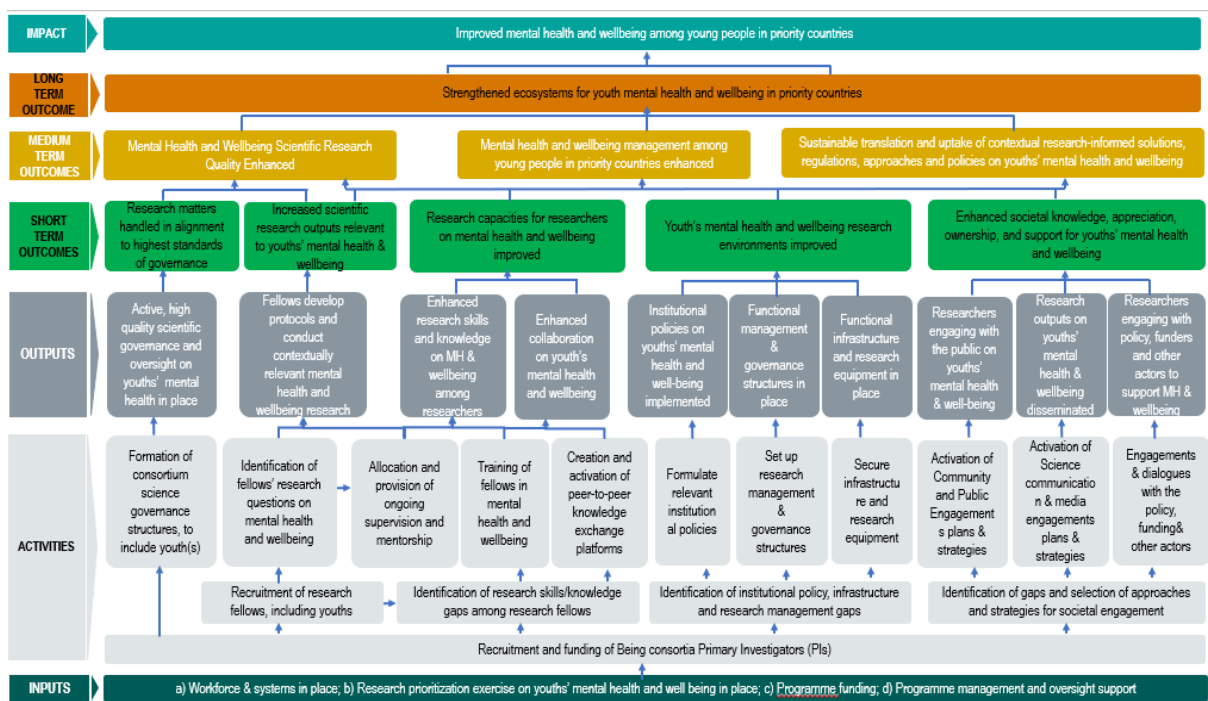
MEAL processes will be very key in this initiative. They will guide the implementing team in establishing a basic, model system for becoming data-driven and building a culture of learning within the initiative. It will also help to track progress, inform on the performance, reporting, support learning, and provide accountability to stakeholders, including funders.

Appropriate processes/activities and resources – including dedicated staff – should be included in the application and budget. The staff will also be required to participate in a global MEAL plans and processes that will evaluate the performance and impact of the Being network research and activities at strategic level to demonstrate impact.

In addition, it is encouraged that the application include some form of engagement with the online learning platform offered by Orygen, the Being learning partner.

Applications should indicate how the proposed programme of research would align with the indicative Theory of Change.

Indicative Theory of Change



Key Principles

Successful Being networks will align their research to international principles for strengthening research capacity in low- and middle- income countries, as identified by ESSENCE on Health Research.* The principles are listed below, together with a description of how they should be applied across each consortium. Applicants may wish to refer to some or all of these principles when preparing submissions.



Network, collaborate, communicate and share experiences

Efforts to strengthen and develop research capacity are part of wider networks of activity. Successful consortia should make efforts to link with other scientific and policy collaborations and initiatives, and to engage effectively with a range of relevant stakeholders.



Understand the local context and evaluate existing research capacity

Research priorities should be informed by local needs, which can be determined in consultation with researchers, communities and policymakers. Decisions on research activities should be informed by assessments of existing and planned resource capacity.



Ensure local ownership and active support

Being networks should be owned and led an institution from one of the priority countries (i.e., Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Romania, Vietnam, Indonesia or Morocco) with full institutional commitment. Government buy-in should be demonstrated by high-level support and active participation, management and leadership.



Build in monitoring, evaluation and learning from the start

Awarded programmes will be asked to develop and implement a monitoring, evaluation and learning plan, based on the overall monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, to capture individual programme learnings and strategy-wide metrics. This process should be quantitative and qualitative, and capture systemic, and process aspects of the work in addition to being capable of capturing unintended consequences to inform systematic learning.



Establish robust research governance and support structures and promote effective leadership

Awarded programmes should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are used to support staff and researchers and to give programme management the mandate to lead and make decisions.



Embed strong support, supervision and mentorship structures

Awarded programmes will be asked to include strong supervisory and mentorship structures to ensure the success of individual students and to contribute to a strong research culture.



Think long-term, be flexible and plan for continuity

Awarded programmes will be encouraged to actively seek long-term sustainability through support from national governments and other funders.



Meaningful youth involvement

Applicants are required to indicate how young people will be meaningfully and realistically included in the project implementation and should strive to address aspects such as: Which young people will be involved and why? What will be their role and how does this complement the study? How will researchers ensure that their role is collaborative and participatory? What are the intended and potential benefits (capacity development, empowerment, emancipation, etc.) for the young people? What risks and challenges are anticipated?



Ecological mitigation plan

The design and implementation of research projects will be required to take cognisance of the ecological impacts of their activities and develop strategies/plans for how to mitigate these. This would include taking into account the nature and extent of resource consumption (e.g. water, energy, land, trees, single-use plastics, and packaging), and the generation of waste and pollution through project activities, and making choices that reduce the negative impacts on natural ecosystems and exacerbate the climate crisis.



Gender and diversity consideration

Research that centres young people and relational wellbeing should clearly consider its implications at the intersection of gender and diversity, if it is to find meaningful use among its target audiences. Research proposals must demonstrate considerations of gender and diversity, including sex as a biological variable and gender as a socio-cultural factor in research projects. These considerations will find effect in how the research teams are composed; how the research is conducted to consider sex and gender as units of analysis; and how these will be given effect in how the projects are executed. How these considerations are integrated should be clearly articulated across the proposal.



In addition to the ESSENCE Principles



Data information and sharing

Open Science and Open Publishing provide additional value-added opportunities for funded research. Applicants shall be required to demonstrate how their research will contribute to data information and sharing as a means of advancing scientific knowledge for Africa's development, and how they will comply with data protection measures. SFA Foundation shall hold these funds to be applied across all consortia for open research publications and data sharing.

Being networks shall be required to share research findings and data that are relevant to any epidemic or pandemic rapidly and openly to inform the public health response.

* ESSENCE on Health Research, 'Seven Principles for Strengthening Research Capacity in Low- and Middle- income Countries: Simple ideas in a complex world', ESSENCE Good practice document series. Available online at [Seven principles for strengthening research capacity in low- and middle-income countries: simple ideas in a complex world \(who.int\)](#)



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