

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR SEED FUNDING GRANTS IN CANCER

Call for funding applications

The Wits Infectious Diseases and Oncology Research Institute (IDORI) announces a seed funding opportunity for pilot/proof-of-principle investigations in the areas of **cancer research**.

IDORI is seeking proposals that will yield proof-of-principle findings and data, providing a foundational basis for highly competitive, larger research proposals to be subsequently submitted to external funding agencies and organisations. Aligned to IDORI's commitment to developing early-career researchers (ECRs), active project leadership on this proposal by an ECR is preferred, mentored by a senior investigator.

To enable sufficient conceptual description of pilot research on an innovative project while accelerating the proposal development and review process, we are seeking **proposals of no more than five narrative pages and one timelines/budget page**. A proposal template form is provided and must be used.

Eligibility

Disciplines: Cancer research.

Investigators: Proposed PIs must have an appointment at Wits University. Investigators may only be involved in one IDORI Seed Funding Grant proposal per funding call cycle. Non-Wits researchers may be included in proposals as Collaborators.

Proposed Principal Investigators who are ECRs must be appointed at the level of: PhD candidate, postdoctoral fellow, lecturer/researcher, or clinician.

Ethics: While ethical clearance will be required from an accredited Institutional Review Board (IRB) before research can commence. It is not required in the proposal.

Basic principles

1. Compelling proposals that focus on the intersection of microbes and cancer, or cancer related research, will be considered.
2. Funds should support innovative research that will provide data to be used to support the rationale and competitiveness for larger funding proposals to sponsors, donors, funding agencies.
3. Funding that could lead to career development, research pathways and technical expertise development for ECRs will be looked at favourably. Ideally, the seed funding will facilitate innovative work by ECRs with appropriate mentorship.
4. Funding should encourage multi-disciplinary, multi-team research, especially within Wits University, as well as among South African or sub-Saharan African Universities and research-related stakeholders (e.g. national facilities, cancer registries).
5. Work should lay the foundation for projects that could lead to translational outcomes and products like diagnostics, vaccines, prevention or management strategies, or therapeutics.
6. There must be a logical scientific basis and rationale for the proposed study.
7. Findings should be achievable within 1-2 years of funding and lay the groundwork for larger "next step proposals" that would be submitted within 18 months.

Additional proposal considerations for evaluation

1. Findings could clearly increase potential for full funding for innovative studies in cancer research.

2. The study will provide relevant data for IDORI mission-driven investigation relevant to oncogenesis or cancer diagnostics, prevention, treatment (preferably high burden cancers)
3. Proposed project involves collaboration between investigators representing two or more disciplines
4. Work will be led by early in career scientists (with strong/appropriate mentoring) with a plan for coaching on leadership/management
5. Research is not likely to be done by others
6. Funding by outside sources not likely at this stage of knowledge

Amount and timing of funding

Up to ten proposals will be funded during 2026 and 2027 for R350k-R500k under this call for proposals. We anticipate several cycles for submission, which will continue until available seed funding is allocated.

The funding commences from the date of completion of (i) the signing of the award letter and (ii) the invoicing of the funding tranche from IDORI, and will terminate based on the timelines as per the agreement between both parties.

Proposal review evaluation

A proposal template form is provided and must be used. IDORI will identify relevant scientists/experts from within and, if necessary, outside of Wits) to review the proposals. A proposal scoring rubric will be provided and each proposal will be scored by at least two independent reviewers. Funding recommendations will be made by an IDORI committee (representing laboratory, clinical and epidemiologic expertise, including infectious disease and cancer disciplines) will convene and decide by consensus (or vote, if necessary) to approve or decline funding. Researchers with a conflict of interest for a specific proposal will be recused from voting but may participate in discussion. Ultimately, decisions will be made by the IDORI Director. The Director reserves the right not to make any awards.

Milestones and Timelines for this first funding cycle

Call for proposals:	Submit the completed application to idori.research@wits.ac.za by Monday, 31st August 2026; 17h00 (SAST) . Unfortunately, no late applications will be accepted.
Reviews/recommendations:	30th September 2026.
Outcomes communicated:	1 st November 2026.
Invoicing/payment of funds:	15 th November 2026.

Grant reporting

Project reporting templates will be provided and must be used. The PI and ECR PL will need to provide a project report (with a max 2-page narrative component, a financial summary, and photographs) every 6-months until the end of the project. These reports will be presented biannually to the IDORI Scientific Advisory Board. A project close-out report will be required 3-months after project completion.

Branding and communications

The successful applicant(s) agree that Wits University and IDORI will be acknowledged in all the peer-reviewed publications, presentations and other outputs associated with this project.