



Strengthening health research capacity in Africa

# Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF) *EXCELL* Research and Leadership Development Programme, Information for Applicants

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AREF is pleased to offer **Excell Researcher and Leadership Development Programme** funded with a grant from the **Robert Bosch Stiftung**. The purpose of this guidance is to help potential applicants understand the aims of the Excell Programme, how the competition is managed and to judge whether you are likely to meet the Programme requirements. Note that individual researchers cannot apply directly to AREF; only representatives of eligible institutions may apply, as described in this document.

## 1. About AREF and the *Excell* Programme

The **Africa Research Excellence Fund (AREF<sup>1</sup>)** was established as a UK-registered charity in 2015. It is linked to the Medical Research Foundation (MRF<sup>2</sup>). AREF aims to nurture *excellent* health research by African researchers, in Africa, with impact for the health and lives of populations in Africa.

Africa shoulders a crippling share of the world's disease burden. Yet African opportunities for emerging post-doctoral scientists to develop, manage and lead their own health-oriented research projects – and then even more ambitious international programmes – are few.

AREF is working to address critical barriers for institutions and talented scientists in Sub-Saharan Africa as they seek to strengthen their capacity to win funds and build leading portfolios of research that can improve health and save lives.

Through its new 2-year *Excell* programme, AREF will work closely with four-to-six research institutions from Sub-Saharan Africa, selected competitively. The programme will support our partners' local strategies and committed actions for researcher and leadership development.

The *Excell* team of experienced facilitators will coach 20 individual researchers (institutional nominees) from the participating research institutions to realise their potential: building strong research careers, empowering excellent teams, winning funding and collaborating internationally.

### 1.1. *Excell* Programme Objectives

The *Excell* programme is centered around three cross-cutting themes and objectives:

1. *Outcomes orientation*: To focus on developmental outcomes that benefit participating researchers and their home institutions and that lead to the production of excellent research outputs
2. *Organisational development*: To have interventions that promote sustained institutional engagement in developing and managing their most talented researchers, thereby enabling committed institutions to grow their research footprint, impact and outcomes.
3. *Individual development*: To provide coaching and experiential learning interventions that enable individuals to realise their research and leadership potential; develop their experience, skills and capabilities; and to meet challenging research and career goals.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.africaresearchexcellencefund.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.medicalresearchfoundation.org.uk>

## 1.2. **Excell Programme benefits**

The *Excell* programme aims to provide your institution with the following opportunities and benefits:

- Intensive developmental support for three or four nominated “rising stars” from your institution
- The opportunity to cascade their learning through your other institutional programmes
- Cooperation and networking between participating institutions, sharing your experience and best practice – and engaging with other networks
- An *Excell* enabled capacity strengthening project involving your institutional lead and *Excell* nominees (researchers), focused on an aspect of local transformation within your bigger set of plans, supported by AREF funding up to 10,000 Euros per institution
- Feed-through into greater success at winning funds and to research with greater impact.

If you apply for an award, you will need to describe how your institution would make these opportunities happen – and how the *Excell* programme would advance your institution’s researcher and research capacity strengthening strategy.

## 1.3. **Learning Themes**

The *Excell* Programme comprises the following five learning themes:

1. The Researcher as Leader
2. The Effective Researcher
3. The Compelling Applicant
4. The Researcher as Manager
5. The Responsible Researcher

## 1.4. **Disciplinary scope**

The scope of this competition for individuals (nominees) applying through their institutions will include global health research, including non-biomedical disciplines applied to challenging health problems such as mathematics, environmental sciences, behavioural social sciences and health economics.

## 1.5. **Duration and programme outline**

The programme’s principle events are spaced as follows over a 17-18 month timetable, within an overall programme length of two years including the calls and immediate post-hoc evaluation:



- Opening and closing conferences with participating institutions and individual researchers.
- Four inspiring and practical residential 3-to-4-day workshops at quarterly intervals
- Supplementary webinars, tutorials and on-line resources
- Baseline and end-of-programme assessments and evaluation
- Cooperation between participating institutions with sharing of expertise and good practice

## 1.6. Faculty

The following individuals make up the *Excell* Faculty:

Tumani Corrah (AREF Director)	Peter Dukes ( <i>Excell</i> Programme Director)
Emma Mairs (Theme Leader)	Jane Kengeya-Kayondo (Theme Leader)
Anthony Kasozi (Theme Leader)	Hazel McCullough (Theme Leader)
Roger Tatoud (Theme Leader)	

## 1.7. Programme governance

At the opening conference a Steering Group will be formed. It will comprise the participating Academic Leads and the faculty of Theme Leaders, and will be chaired by the AREF Director. The early career participants will be consulted on how best to ensure their voices are heard. The decision of the AREF Director will be final in all matters concerning selection of institutions and nominees and of programme management

## 1.8. Role of the Institution

To ensure sustainability and integration, the selected institutions will need to engage throughout the programme.

1. The institutions' Designated Academic Leads (Lead Applicants) will participate in the two conferences. The first conference (launch) will be focused on the needs and capabilities of the selected institutions and how they engage effectively throughout the programme. The conference will cover, for instance, institutional strategies for researcher development, diversity, mentorship, monitoring and evaluation, sustainability and user engagement. We shall also demonstrate some of the learning modules and our style.
2. Academic Leads through the Steering Committee will be consulted on the curriculum and programme, so as to fine-tune them to the institutions' needs and programme objectives.
3. Partner institutions will be welcome to volunteer to host a workshop or the final conference, or to propose and lead webinars between the workshops; and to contribute appropriate facilitators and learning resources that they already use and wish to share.
4. The concluding conference will focus on (i) sustainability of graduating participants' and institutional commitments to on-going researcher and leadership development; and (ii) translation of research to downstream users and ultimate health benefits.
5. Partners will contribute to formal evaluation of the pilot and to consideration of sustainability and a follow-up programme option informed by this pilot.

## 2. Eligibility

### 2.1. Institutions

This call is open to **universities** and other internationally-recognised **research institutions** based in Sub-Saharan Africa that are a **legal entity** established for purposes that include **research** and **research training**. "Internationally-recognised" means that the institution can evidence funding, staffing, governance and outputs that show it has connections and impact outside the country in which it is legally established. "Based in..." means that the leadership, governance and programmes of the institution are based unequivocally within the region (a field-site directed by an institution outside the region would not be considered eligible).

Applications will be submitted to AREF by an Academic / Researcher-Development Lead who, as **Lead Applicant/Designated Academic Lead**, is authorized to do so by the leadership of the institution. The Academic Lead (as the named principal applicant) will be responsible for developing and implementing the *Excell* programme within their institution.

Your application will need to be sponsored by the institution's leadership: a named official with responsibility for research capacity development, such as the pro-vice chancellor for research or the research institution's director, must personally engage in local sponsorship and governance of the *Excell* programme. They will be the Sponsor of the *Excell* programme within their institution.

AREF will accept applications from an entity within a university, such as a faculty, institute or research centre, provided that the application is authorised by the institutional leadership. Only ONE application will be accepted from each university or research institution.

Joint applications, such as between two universities or a university and an independent research institution, are welcome: one institution shall be identified as the lead and will be responsible for ensuring sound governance and implementation.

AREF will NOT accept applications from institutions to add to an existing, funded researcher development activity that has the same objectives as *Excell*.

The selection criteria are described at Section 5.3.1.

## 2.2. Institutional nominees

To qualify as a participant for the *Excell* Programme, your nominees must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- A national of sub-Saharan African state
- Employed in an eligible institution in a post with a significant and specific *research* role.
- *Scientists and clinicians with a PhD*: 2- to 6 full-years of active postdoctoral research experience. *Clinicians without a PhD*: Both (i) an MD or research Masters *and* (ii) 4- to 7 years of active research experience.
- Declaration that they have not participated in an equivalent programme to *Excell*, or in separate training events that cover more than two of the AREF five Learning themes (see Section 1.3).

Selection criteria that institutions should incorporate in their own process are described in Section 5.3.2.

Institutions must rank their nominees so as to assist the AREF Selection Panel (Section 5.2) achieve a balanced yet diverse cohort of 20 outstanding individuals from across the four to six successful institutions.

Including ineligible nominees or evidence of a weak selection process will reduce the chance of the institution succeeding in its application.

## 2.3. Participation of AREF Fellows

The normal way for AREF past and present Fellows to participate is to be nominated by their institutions, being considered in competition with other would-be nominees. In addition, if there are vacant places, the AREF Director may include in the programme AREF Fellows from institutions that are not participating provided that the Fellows otherwise fully meet the criteria.

## 2.4. Equality and diversity

Equality and diversity are core values of the Africa Research Excellence Fund and we encourage applications by African scientists irrespective of gender, marital status, colour, race, creed, ethnic or national origin.

We strongly welcome eligible applicants from **francophone and lusophone countries** as well as from anglophone countries.

## 2.5. Language competency

All applications should be written in comprehensible, good English but complete fluency is not required.

Institutions should ensure that their nominees have a good command of the English language so they can engage fully and confidently in the programme. We recommend participants whose first working language is not English are able to demonstrate evidence of at least a “good” command of English, and preferably “excellent,” as defined by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine English Language Requirements Policy (<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/files/english-language-requirements.pdf> see Band B of the table at 3.4 of the policy).

# 3. Finance

## 3.1. AREF-supported costs

Up to 10,000 Euros funding will be available to support a capacity-strengthening project involving your team, the core of which will be your institution’s *Excell* Academic Lead and nominees. Your team will design and deliver the project during the programme period. The project will be focused on catalysing your institutional capacity development strategy. It should aim to be transformative, and to demonstrate how your institution can integrate and sustain the benefits of participating in the *Excell* programme.

Additionally, AREF will fund all AREF-approved travel and subsistence costs of participating Academic leads and nominees, training materials and teaching costs relating to the conferences, workshops and online learning.

## 3.2. Financial management

The majority of the funding will be handled by AREF. Consequently, only the award to the participating institutions to support their research capacity strengthening strategy will normally be made to the institution. The award will only fund the specified direct costs of the award. Selected institutions will need to assure AREF that they have sufficient financial management systems in place to manage their award through a due diligence check.

The institution and not AREF shall be liable for all costs incurred due to withdrawal, cancellation, no show or other default by its participants for whatever reason, unless caused directly by an error of AREF itself.

# 4. Application Process

Applicants should set aside enough time to get the application approved and signed ahead of the deadline. You should consult academic and research support / management staff of your institution at an early stage. Each institution may submit only one application (see Section 2.1).

#### 4.1. Preparation

Applicants should do the following:

- Read the Application Form, paying particular attention to the guidance in italics.
- Ensure that their application can be approved and signed in time for the deadline.

#### 4.2. Application

Applicants must submit the following as PDFs:

1. A completed application form signed by the institution's leadership, "the Sponsor": a named official with responsibility for research capacity development, such as the pro-vice chancellor for research or the research institution's director. The lead applicant must also sign the form.
2. A letter from the Sponsor in support of the application. The letter should address the following:
  - A brief statement of the institution's capabilities in global health research and research management
  - How the Sponsor is directly involved in research capacity building and, in particular, researcher and leadership capacity development (academic development)
  - How the Sponsor will integrate the *Excell* programme into the institution's research capacity development strategy
  - The potential to work with other institutions, such as national and regional capacity development networks, to enhance researcher and leadership development
3. The short academic CV of the Lead Applicant/Designated Academic Lead (and any co-applicants).
4. *Selected* documents as appendices to supplement the account in the application form. You may for instance include:
  - An organogram showing governance of the institutional capacity development strategy
  - Relevant strategy documents (or extracts of)
  - Relevant data, for instance on the portfolio of global health research and research capacity development grants.Each appendix must be numbered and clearly titled. It must reference the section of the Application Form to which it is relevant: conversely, the Application form must reference the appendix by number. However, be selective.
5. The portfolio of nominees' information, comprising the following:
  - The application forms and short CVs of up to four nominated researchers
  - Nominees' evidence: Best two publications (if not easily accessible on the web), their PhD certificate (or equivalent).
6. Evidence supporting your account in the application form of your selection process for nominating researchers, e.g. PDF of an internal call.
7. All submitted documents must be named strictly in accordance with the naming guidance on Part D of the application form

*The deadline for receipt of Applications and supporting documents: 1600 hours (GMT) on 15 March 2018, submitted to [aref@mrf.mrc.ac.uk](mailto:aref@mrf.mrc.ac.uk).*

## 5. Selection process

### 5.1. Eligibility checks

All applications will be checked by AREF secretariat for eligibility against the Eligibility Criteria (see Section 2.1). Ineligible applicants will be informed by 31st March 2018.

### 5.2. Selection Panel

AREF will establish an independent multidisciplinary Selection Panel, balanced by gender and region, chaired by an international scientist with research capacity strengthening experience in SS Africa. It will include: (i) Members of the AREF College of Experts; (ii) researchers independent of AREF; and (iii) two *Excell* Theme Leads.

The eligible applications will be assessed by the Panel comprising, as near as possible, 50% women. The panel will include francophone members and scientists from a wide range of research disciplines.

The Panel will advise the AREF Director, who will have the final decision to approve institutional and individual participation.

### 5.3. Selection criteria

#### 5.3.1 Institutions

The AREF selection panel will use four main criteria for short-listing institutions and, in italics, the type of evidence to present in the institutional application form:

1. Active development of an institutional strategy for research and research capacity strengthening that includes researcher and leadership development, with evidence of implementation. *A brief account of the policies and systems that are in place, or are being developed, of resources committed by the institution's leadership, and examples of activities implemented. Maximum 1200 words.*
2. A convincing plan for integrating the *Excell* programme within that strategy, with an emphasis on demonstrating outcomes and achieving sustainability. *How you might integrate the knowledge and skills developed through Excell within your own strategy, including how you could use up to 10,000 Euros, and how would you measure success? Maximum 1500 words.*
3. A portfolio of competitively awarded (through "peer review") global health research projects, funded nationally by government and internationally by donors and research funders. *(a) Headline numbers and financial value of externally funded global health (i) research and (ii) capacity development projects / programmes that were "live," as reported your most recent annual institutional research report (or equivalent report);*
4. The fit of the institution's cadre of nominees to the *Excell* programme objectives. *(a) A short account of the institution's advertising and selection process (Maximum 500 words). (b) The accompanying portfolio of nominee applications forms and CVs. The institution should strive to nominate a balanced and diverse set of "rising stars" (Section 2.2), and must rank nominees from 1 (top) to 4.*

#### 5.3.2 Nominees

The Institution's criteria and process for nomination must be fair and transparent, designed to attract applications from strong performers ("rising stars"), and achieve gender balance and

disciplinary diversity within the institutional cohort. The criteria should be explicit and based on the following:

1. The individual's track record of research productivity and achievement (appropriate to their career stage and discipline): *Account of role(s), outputs, achievements, and markers of esteem...*
2. An ambitious yet credible personal career vision and plan. *Personal statement (Maximum 500 words).*
3. A persuasive account of how participating in the *Excell* programme has the potential to benefit themselves and their institution. *Statement. (Maximum 300 words).*
4. Such other criteria as the institution itself specifies.

## 6. Notifications to applicants

AREF will notify eligible institutions about the outcome of the selection process by 12 April 2018.

## 7. Key dates

Some key dates and times are as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
18 December 2017	Call is launched
<b>15 March 2018</b>	Call closes
22 March 2018	Notification to ineligible applicants
12 April 2018	Notification of the outcome of the selection process
<b>28 &amp; 29 May 2018</b>	Opening Conference (Academic Leads and Trainees), Dakar, Senegal
29 to 31 May 2018	Workshop 1 (Trainees only), Dakar, Senegal
1 to 3 October 2018	Workshop 2 (Trainees), tentatively in UK

## 8. Contacts at AREF

All questions should be sent to **Sulayman Janneh (Awards and Finance Manager)** at [aref@mrf.mrc.ac.uk](mailto:aref@mrf.mrc.ac.uk) (please include Excell in the Subject Line).

[END of Information for Applicants, 18 December 2017]