

African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence (ARISE) - Pilot Programme

Guide for Applicants: Expressions of Interest

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1 Introduction

Since 2015, the African Academy of Sciences (AAS) - through the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESAs) platform - has supported the development of research leadership and high-quality scientific environments in sub-Saharan Africa. The support has been provided through various programmatic models focused on the agenda setting and prioritization of research focus areas, development of talented individual researchers, as well as strengthening institutional and national environments for research. Other interventions include identifying and filling critical gaps in Africa's research ecosystems by, inter alia, training early career researchers; providing pathways for translating research into innovative products and services; promoting community and public engagement in research; strengthening governance and research management through creation of standards; building a pan-African platform for mobilising resources for funding research on the continent; and launching an Open Research publication platform to promote access to research findings.

Building on these interventions, and in recognition of the long-term commitment needed to strengthen and sustain capacity development on the continent, the African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence Pilot Programme (ARISE-PP) contributes to efforts aimed at transforming Africa into a knowledge-based and innovation-led continent.

2 An overview of ARISE-PP

The ARISE-PP targets 40 emerging African research talents across 40 African countries and aims at enabling them and their ideas to be recognised and offered further development opportunities. The programme offers grants to early career African scientists selected through the application of scientific excellence criteria and based on a continental bottom-up open competition. The main features of this pilot programme include:

- A call for proposals that is open to **African researchers in all areas of scientific endeavour. Proposals should take into account the priorities of the AU-EU High Level Policy Dialogue on Science Technology and Innovation (Public Health, Green Transition, Innovation and Technology, Capacities for science)**, and should demonstrate the capacity to deliver cutting-edge research, to be selected through a rigorous grant award process
- The call for applications targets African researchers with **2 to 7 years of post-PhD experience** but with considerable and demonstrable research leadership experience. The ARISE grantees are awarded **grants of up to EUR 500 000 over a period of up to 5 years** to start their own independent research team and project
- The ARISE grantees and their research teams are **hosted in African higher education or research institutions** from 40 African countries
- A **Scientific Advisory Committee**, composed of eminent African and European scientists, guarantees the scientific independence and aptness of the initiative

The overall objective of the ARISE-PP project is to broaden and strengthen Africa's science base through open and direct continental competition for funding amongst the very best young African researchers with the aim of contributing to the transformation of Africa into a knowledge-based and innovation-led continent.

The specific objectives are

- a. To **enhance the capabilities** of emerging African research leaders committed to a research and teaching career in Africa
- b. To **strengthen institutional research management** and support systems to **enable pan-African research to thrive**
- c. To support the generation of **cutting-edge research** in contribution to the transformation of Africa into a knowledge-based and innovation-led continent and towards the transformation of lives in Africa through science

2.1 Focus areas for ARISE-PP grants

The ARISE-PP grants are open to applications from all fields of research, reflecting on the African Union and European Union priorities of cooperation.

3 Call for applications

3.1 How to apply

The ARISE-PP invites applications from grantees with specific scientific objectives and contributions towards research at the frontiers of any area of science. **Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research projects may be aligned to local, national, and regional strategic priority areas and research needs.**

Proposed activities must be clearly and comprehensively described in the grant applications in response to the call for applications. Proposed project activities must, primarily, take place in one or more Member States of the African Union. Where an applicant proposes to carry out some activities in non-African countries, an explanation will be required in the application form to show justification for the said location within the context of the overall action and how these activities contribute to the achievement of the overall objective.

Applications that strongly support and commit to safeguarding and diverse workplaces, **balance excellence with equity** in the selection of partner and collaborating institutions and recruitment of trainees, and can demonstrate **value for money, risk management, and ability to build strong research cultures and environments are strongly encouraged.**

Applications for the ARISE-PP grants will be made in two stages;

a) Expression of Interest

Applicants will be required to submit **brief concept notes on how they, and their proposed projects, meet the specifications detailed** in this call document . Shortlisted candidates from the Expressions of Interest will be invited to submit full applications.

b) Submission of Full Applications

Submitted Expressions of Interest will be taken through a technical review process – on a rolling basis - after which successful applicants will be invited to submit full applications. While scientific merit remains the overriding criterion for candidate selection for the ARISE-PP grants, adjustments may be made to ensure balance in gender, geographical location, and research field. Ultimately, a minimum of 40 ARISE-PP grants will be awarded to young African research talents across 40 African countries.

Applications must be submitted via the [AAS Grants Management system \(Ishango\)](#).

Application forms, guidance notes, and links to other relevant documents are available online at <https://www.aasciences.africa/call/arise>

3.2 Language

All applications and their supporting documents must be submitted in English. Supporting documents issued in a language other than English should be accompanied with their English translation.

3.3 Important dates

Submission of Expressions of Interest opens on **18 June 2021** and closes at **17.00 EAT on 30 July 2021**.

Successful Expressions of Interest will be invited to submit full applications between September and October 2021

Funding decisions will be made by March 2022

ARISE-PP Fellowships will begin in April/May 2022

3.4 Grant size and duration

The maximum grant amount per grantee is a lump sum of **EUR 500,000 for a period not exceeding 60 months (5 years)**.

Selected candidates for ARISE-PP grant award will be given an opportunity to revise their proposed budgets in accordance with comments/suggestions made by the selection committee. The revised budget proposals will be reviewed by the ARISE Programme Team and a final (non-negotiable) decision made on the grant award amount.

3.5 Fundable items

Proposed activities must be clearly and comprehensively described in the grant applications in response to the call for applications. Proposed project activities must, primarily, take place in one or more Member States of the African Union. Where an applicant proposes to carry out some activities in non-African countries, an explanation will be required in the application form to show justification for the said location (within the context of the overall project) and how these activities contribute to the achievement of the overall objective. The ARISE-PP Team shall decide on the activities to be conducted outside of African countries.

The following list of indicative and non-exhaustive activities may be implemented by the grantees:

- **Field research activities**
- Participation in **capacity building activities** (i.e. inception workshop, annual scientific meetings)
- **Training and mentoring** for postgraduate researchers
- Participation in networking events and **conferences**
- Visiting periods in partner research institutions (up to 6 months spread throughout the grant period) with pre-authorization from the ARISE Programme Team
- **Communication and dissemination** of research results
- **Stipends** for the Principal Investigator (PI) and **research assistants** (i.e. PhD and master's students who are part of the PI's team)
- Other **direct research costs** (including allowable **equipment** for research and project work)

During the proposal peer review process, evaluation panels will assess the funding requested against the needs of the project before making any recommendation for funding. The funding requested must be fully justified by an estimation of the real project cost. The panels may suggest modifications to the indicative budgetary breakdown in the application, particularly where they consider funding requests not to be properly justified. In such cases, they shall explain in writing any such suggested modification.

The PI will have the freedom to modify the budgetary breakdown during the project implementation, in accordance with the AAS Cost Guidelines¹ and Policy on Virement².

The ARISE-PP financial contribution will take the form of 100% reimbursement of the total eligible and approved direct costs. Where applicable, the calculation for indirect costs should be supported by the host institution's policies as a percentage or a breakdown of individual costs/activities provided that the rate does **not exceed 7%** of all eligible direct costs and that the requested project budget (inclusive of indirect costs) is within the grant amount limit of EUR 500,000.

The awarded grant amount represents a maximum overall figure, the final amount of which must be justified based on the costs actually incurred for the project.

3.5.1 Required budget items

All grantees are required to budget for the following items (in addition to other budget items);

- a) **Three international (within Africa) meetings of about 3 days each, planned for the first, third, and fifth years of the project**
- b) **Annual grant audit costs**

3.6 Eligibility criteria

3.6.1 Eligible Principal Investigators (PIs)

The ARISE-PP grantees will be 40 African early-career scientists hosted in 40 African institutions of higher learning or research from 40 African countries (at least one host institution per country). Where necessary, grantees will be allowed to select team members from other higher education/research institutions. Up to 6 months (cumulative) of research visits outside the PI's host institution will be allowed for purposes of skills transfer and capacity and network building. Where cross-country collaborations are established, at least 70% of the research team should be of the same nationality as the host institution. Successful ARISE-PP applicants must meet the following requirements:

- A PhD degree obtained 2 to 7 years (inclusive) from the date of submission of the Expression of Interest
- Must have been employed as a postdoctoral researcher or (assistant) professor for at least 2 years (cumulatively)
- Possess demonstrable research leadership experience
- Be identified as the PI of the research project supported by the ARISE Pilot Programme
- Be willing to conduct the ARISE research project at an African University/Research Institution, based in one of the African Union Member States

¹ <https://www.aasciences.africa/policies/aas-cost-guidelines>

² <https://www.aasciences.africa/policies/policy-virement>

- Can recruit, coordinate, and co-supervise a research team composed of, indicatively, **2 PhD and 4 Master's students** depending on the requirements of the field of research and the objectives of the research project. Additional students could be considered on duly justified reasons clearly explained in the grant application, with a maximum of **4 PhD and 8 Master's students per research team**
- Be responsible for the overall project implementation and capacity building of their research team through mentorship and supervision – with the support of their host institutions

The applications shall detail the financial and operational monitoring and support mechanism, which will be put in place by the grantees to ensure a successful implementation of their ARISE-PP projects.

Applicants for the ARISE-PP grants must not fall under any of the exclusion criteria referred to in point 2.6.10 of the PRAG³.

3.6.1.1 Minimum time commitment

Principal Investigators for the ARISE-PP grants are required to commit at least 80% of their working time on their ARISE-PP projects.

Applications not meeting the Principal Investigator's required "Minimum time commitment" will be declared ineligible.

Time commitments will be monitored throughout the grant period. Where the actual time commitment is below the threshold set out in this Call for Applications, or the levels indicated in the grant agreement, appropriate measures may be taken up to and including grant reduction, suspension, or termination in accordance with the grant agreement.

3.6.2 Eligible Host Institution

ARISE-PP grants will be signed between the AAS and the host institution - rather than the PI - for purposes of accountability. The Host Institution (HI) will explicitly commit to offer appropriate conditions for the Principal Investigator to independently direct the research and manage its funding for the duration of the grant. The contracts will specifically refer to the PI and the research project that has been awarded the ARISE-PP Grant, as provided for in the AAS Acceptance of Grants Policy⁴.

ARISE-PP host institutions eligible for financial support must meet the following criteria:

- Be a legal entity established as higher education institution or research centre in one of the Member States of the African Union
- Must engage and host the Principal Investigator for at least the duration of the ARISE-PP project
- Be a leading African institution able to provide an excellent research environment and facilities that match the requirements of the proposed research project, and
- Be directly responsible for the supervision of the research activities being funded

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/prag/document.do?nodeNumber=2.6.10.1>

⁴ <https://www.aasciences.africa/policies/acceptance-grants-policy>

Proposed host institutions for the grant award finalists will be subjected to a pre-award due diligence process to ascertain the ability of the institutions to host the ARISE-PP grantees. The due diligence process will be done in three stages;

- a) **Self-assessment on the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP⁵) Platform.** Representatives of proposed host institutions will create an account on the GFGP platform and respond to an online questionnaire whose responses will be used to assess the suitability of the said institution to host the ARISE-PP grant. The GFGP standard;
 - Allows community-based organisations, NGOs, research, and academic institutions of any size to rate their capability to receive and manage grants
 - Provides an online self-assessment tool covering four grant management practice areas: financial management, human resources, procurement, and governance
 - Institutions are benchmarked on a cumulative four-tier assessment – Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum
- b) **Desk review of the GFGP self-assessments by an external consultant.** The consultant will;
 - Check the compliance of host institution to the GFGP assessment standard
 - Identify gaps from self-assessment result
 - Request for specific documentation (e.g. policies, processes, procedures, manuals, etc) that will help with the host institution assessment process
 - Engage, through the ARISE Programme Team, with the proposed host institution to share the gaps identified and recommendations made for improvement
- c) **Due diligence site visits.** Where necessary, the ARISE Programme Team will conduct pre-award due diligence visits as part of the proposed host institution assessment

A detailed report of the financial and programmatic assessment will be produced and shared with relevant stakeholders. Where a proposed host institution does not meet the minimum threshold to host the ARISE-PP grant, the PI will be required to propose another host institution. The newly proposed institution will also be subjected to a due diligence process to ensure compliance. Comments and recommendations made on the compliance status of the proposed host institutions that meet the minimum threshold for grant award will be shared with the host institutions for implementation as part of the Grant Terms and Conditions. The ARISE Programme Team will follow-up to ensure that the host institutions address the issues raised within agreed timelines, failure to which the said host institutions will be considered to have breached the grant terms and conditions.

Offers for the ARISE Grants will be made to candidates and host institutions that pass the due diligence process, and grant awards will be signed on acceptance of the offers.

3.6.2.1 Letters of Support

Expressions of Interest must be supported by a letter of institutional support from the proposed host institution. However, full applications must be supported by letters of support from senior institutional leadership (e.g. Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Directors of Research, etc) in all lead and partner host institutions.

⁵www.aasciences.africa/ggc

3.6.3 Restrictions on submission of proposals

The AAS calls are highly competitive and attract thousands of high-quality proposals from which only a few outstanding proposals are funded. To maintain the quality and integrity of ARISE-PP's application evaluation process, the following restrictions apply:

- A researcher may participate as a Principal Investigator in only one ARISE-PP research project at any one time

4 Evaluation procedure and criteria

4.1 Evaluation procedure

The ARISE-PP strongly encourages **multi- and inter-disciplinary research proposals**. Submitted Expressions of Interest will be evaluated in two stages;

- a) **Triage**: This process checks for completeness and basic eligibility of applications before submitting them to expert review
- b) **Expert Review**: Applications making it through the Triage exercise will be reviewed by a Technical Review Panel comprised of independent experts in ARISE-PP's respective research focus areas. Applications making it through the Expert Review process will be invited to submit full applications

NB: Full Applications will also be evaluated through Triage and Expert Review after which shortlisted applications will be taken through an interview process to determine the finalists for grant award.

4.2 Evaluation criteria

Scientific excellence is the primary criterion of evaluation of ARISE-PP applications. It will be applied in conjunction with the evaluation of both:

- the ground-breaking nature, ambition, and feasibility of the research project, and
- the intellectual capacity, creativity, and commitment of the Principal Investigator

Applicants should indicate how their proposed research projects align with the **objectives of ARISE-PP** as detailed in Section 2 of this Guide for Applicants.

Generally, projects wholly or largely consisting in the collation and compilation of existing material in new databases, editions or collections are unlikely to constitute ground-breaking or "frontier" research in themselves however useful such resources might be to subsequent original research. Therefore, such projects are unlikely to be recommended for funding by the ARISE-PP review panels.

Plagiarism detection software may be used to analyse proposals submitted for ARISE-PP grants.

The following are some of the evaluation elements that apply to the excellence of the research project and the Principal Investigator;

a) Principal Investigator (s)

Intellectual capacity and creativity

- To what extent has the PI demonstrated the **ability to conduct ground-breaking research?**
- To what extent does the PI provide **evidence of creative independent thinking?**

- To what extent does the PI have the required **scientific expertise and capacity** to successfully execute the project?

b) Research Project

Ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research project

- To what extent does the proposed research **address important challenges**?
- To what extent are the objectives **ambitious** and beyond the state of the art (e.g. novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)?
- To what extent is the proposed research **high risk-high gain** (i.e. if successful the payoffs will be very significant, but there is a high risk that the research project does not entirely fulfil its aims)?

Scientific Approach

- To what extent is the outlined **scientific approach feasible** bearing in mind the extent that the proposed research is high- risk/gain (based on the extended synopsis)?
- To what extent does the **proposal go beyond** what the individual Principal Investigators could achieve alone?
- To what extent is the combination of **scientific elements put forward** in the proposal crucial to address the scope and complexity of the research question?
- To what extent are the **proposed research methodology and working arrangements** appropriate to achieve the goals of the project?
- To what extent does the proposal involve the development of **novel methodology**?
- To what extent are the **proposed timescales, resources, and PI commitment adequate and properly justified**?

4.3 Evaluation outcome

At the end of the evaluation process, submissions for the Expressions of Interest will be ranked by the Expert Review Panel based on the Panel's overall appreciation of the submission's strengths and weaknesses and scores given to them. All submissions not meeting the completeness and basic eligibility criteria will be rated as:

- not complete and/or eligible to pass to the next step of the evaluation process

All submissions meeting the completeness and basic eligibility criteria will be subjected to an expert review process and scored as follows:

- is of sufficient quality to pass to Full Application stage
- is of high quality but not sufficient to pass Full Application stage
- is not of sufficient quality to pass to Full Application stage

At the end of the evaluation process for Full Applications, the proposal will receive one of the following scores:

- fully meets the ARISE-PP's excellence criterion and is recommended for funding if sufficient funds are available
- meets some elements of the ARISE-PP's excellence criterion and is not recommended for funding

5 Grant terms and conditions

All grants funded through the AAS/Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) are subject to the AAS/AESA's Grant Management Policies specified in the grant agreements and available at <https://bit.ly/3qHCto6>. Additionally, ARISE-PP grants are subject to the following principles:

5.1 Open access

The ARISE-PP supports the principle of open access to the published output of research, including (particularly) peer-reviewed articles and monographs, as a fundamental part of its mission. It also supports the basic principle of open access to research data and data related products such as computer code. The ARISE-PP considers that providing free online access to all these materials can be the most effective way of ensuring that the fruits of the research it funds can be accessed, read, and used as the basis for further research. Hence, all beneficiaries of ARISE-PP grants must ensure open access to all peer-reviewed scientific publications⁶ relating to their results.

5.2 Gender balance

Beneficiaries of all ARISE-PP grants must take all measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the implementation of the action and aim for a gender balance at all levels of personnel assigned to the action. ARISE-PP Principal Investigators should also determine the relevance of integrating sex and gender analysis into their research. Specific activities promoting equal opportunities or gender balance or covering the gender dimension of research funded by the ARISE-PP can be considered as eligible costs where these costs are necessary for the implementation of the action.

5.3 Ethical principles

The proposed research and innovation activities shall comply with ethical principles and relevant national, European Union and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols. Particular attention shall be paid to the principle of proportionality, the right to privacy, the right to the protection of personal data, the right to the physical and mental integrity of a person, the right to non-discrimination and the need to ensure high levels of human health protection. The proposed research and innovation activities shall have an exclusive focus on civil applications.

Funding of human embryonic stem cell research is possible within the ethical framework defined in the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation 2014 – 2020⁷.

5.4 Research integrity

It is essential to maintain and promote a culture of research integrity at all stages of the evaluation and granting process to make ARISE-PP competitions fair and efficient and to maintain the trust of both the scientific community and society. Cases of scientific misconduct such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or misrepresentation of data that may arise during the evaluation or throughout the life cycle of an ARISE-PP funded project will be addressed vigorously by the ARISE-PP team within the applicable legal and

⁶ This includes peer-reviewed long-text publications such as monographs, book chapters, edited collections, critical editions, scholarly exhibition catalogues, or PhD theses

⁷ As set out in Commission Declaration 2013/C 373/02 of 20 December 2013

procedural framework. Any breach of research integrity by Principal Investigators or beneficiaries may be sanctioned by measures such as the rejection of proposals from evaluation, requests for measures to be taken by the host institution, reduction of the grant and suspension or termination of grants.

However, the host institutions that engage and host ARISE-PP Principal Investigators have the primary responsibility for the detection of scientific misconduct and for the investigation, and adjudication of any breaches of research integrity that may arise. Therefore, host institutions are expected to have functioning structures in place to uphold research integrity and to make all appropriate efforts to verify that no allegations of scientific misconduct are pending against any Principal Investigator applying for or participating in an ARISE-PP grant and to bring to the attention of the ARISE-PP any such allegations or cases of scientific misconduct.

The ARISE-PP applies the same rigour to ensuring that its evaluation process is governed by principles of research integrity, particularly through rules on confidentiality and conflict of interest.

Further information

Please visit <https://www.aasciences.africa/call/arise> for more information regarding the ARISE-PP call. Should you require any further information, please contact the ARISE Programme Team via arise@aasciences.africa