



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Catalyst Grants for Early-Career Researchers

Supporting Transformative Innovation in Epidemic and Pandemic Sciences

About SHARPER Project

The Strengthening Health Systems Capacity in Africa for Pandemic Equity and Responsiveness (SHARPER) project is a consortium of six African institutions from Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN), Cameroon; Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS), Malawi; Tropical Institute of Community Health (TICH), Kenya; University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria; Afna Ya Haki, Uganda; and University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. The goal of SHARPER is to strengthen health research systems for ethical, equitable, and rights-based pandemic responsiveness, grounded in African values. SHARPER is funded under the Epidemic and Pandemic Science Innovation & Leadership Networks (EPSILON) Initiative, which aims to empower African countries to build pandemic preparedness and prevent inequities, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. EPSILON is a collaboration among the Science for Africa Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya; the Pandemic Sciences Institute, University of Oxford, UK; and the Mastercard Foundation, Canada.

SHARPER consortium is pleased to announce a **Call for Applications** for the **2026 Catalyst Grants**. These awards are designed to identify, support, and accelerate **innovative, high-impact ideas** led by **early-career African researchers** advancing epidemic and pandemic sciences.

About the Catalyst Grants

The Catalyst Grants aim to stimulate **bold, groundbreaking initiatives** with the potential to drive **transformative changes** in Africa's preparedness for epidemics and pandemics. These awards serve as flexible, rapid-impact funding mechanisms that allow emerging scientists to explore new directions, pilot novel methods, initiate cross-disciplinary collaborations, and rapidly test promising concepts.

Funding may be used to:

- Pilot new or high-risk ideas

- Supplement ongoing research by adding an innovative component.
- Launch standalone exploratory studies.
- Foster collaboration between researchers, institutions, or industry partners
- Strengthen early-career researchers' scientific leadership and visibility.

Projects may be conducted **within a single institution** or **collaboratively across institutions or sectors**.

Grant Size and Number of Awards

- **In 2026, 8 catalyst grants will be awarded from the participating institutions, as shown below:**
 - **Cameroon: 1**
 - **Kenya: 2**
 - **Nigeria: 2**
 - **Malawi: 2**
 - **Uganda: 1**
- **Award value: \$15,000** (inclusive of grant management and administrative support costs))
- **Grant period: Typically 6 – 12 Months**

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. **Early-career researcher** (within 7 years or equivalent research qualification; or a mid-level research officer/scientist transitioning to independence).
2. Affiliated with an **African academic, research, public health, or industry institution**.
3. Working in any area relevant to **epidemic and pandemic sciences**, including but not limited to:
 - Health systems resilience
 - Social and behavioural aspects of epidemic preparedness
 - Ethical and human rights perspectives in pandemic preparedness
 - Dissemination and uptake of health research
 - Community-centred preparedness and response
 - Decolonial perspectives on health systems strengthening in Africa
 - Outbreak analytics and modelling

- One Health and Environmental determinants
- Clinical or operational research
- Diagnostics, surveillance, or laboratory systems
- 4. Demonstrated capacity to complete the proposed project within the grant duration.
- 5. Willingness to publish project outputs on the **Open Research Africa (ORA)** platform.

Priority will be given to Proposals that:

- Demonstrate **innovation**, creativity, or a novel methodological approach
- Address **locally relevant challenges** in epidemic/pandemic preparedness.
- Foster **cross-disciplinary collaboration**.
- Strengthen **equity**, including youth and women-led research.
- Have the potential for **scalability**, **policy relevance**, or integration into public health systems.
- Contribute to workforce development in Africa's scientific ecosystem.

Required Application Materials

Applicants must submit the following:

1. **Concept Note (2–3 pages)** including:
 - Project title
 - Background and rationale
 - Statement of the innovative or transformative idea
 - Research objectives and expected outcomes
 - Methods and activities
 - Timeline (6–12 months)
 - Expected outputs and dissemination plan
2. **Budget (max \$15,000)** with justification in a spreadsheet. Budget should include International and local travel related to the grant (10%), accommodation and subsistence during the period (10%),

personnel (25%), bench fees or institutional access charges/laboratory use/equipment (35%), dissemination cost (10%), open-access publication and data-sharing (10%). A sample of the budget spreadsheet will be shared. The budget categories may be adjusted with clear justification depending on project needs, provided the total requested amount does not exceed the maximum award ceiling.

3. **CV (max 3 pages)** for the PI and key team members.
4. **Letter of institutional affiliation/support.**
5. **Recommendation from a mentor.**

Deliverables

Awardees are required to:

- Submit a **final project report** within one month of project completion.
- Prepare and publish at least one **manuscript, policy brief, or dataset, metadata** on **Open Research Africa** and other outlets that are peer reviewed and archived.
- Participate and share research findings in SHARPER EPSILON knowledge-sharing events.
- All funded projects must acknowledge the source of funding

How to Apply

Applications should be submitted electronically via:

sharperproject.com

Deadline for submission: [\[30th September 2026\]](#)

Review and Selection Procedures

Applications will undergo a **competitive, peer-reviewed assessment** based on:

- Scientific merit
- Innovation
- Feasibility
- Relevance to epidemic/pandemic preparedness

- Potential for impact
- Applicant's career stage and development needs

Award Timeline

Activity	Date
Call Release	1 st September 2026
Application Deadline	30 th September 2026
Screening and Interview	6th November 2026
Notification of Awardees	9th November 2026
Earliest Start Date	1 st December 2026

Enquiries

For questions or clarifications, please contact:

[\[info@sharperproject.com\]](mailto:info@sharperproject.com)

Disclaimer

Attention will be given to early-career researchers, women-led projects, youth, displaced persons, and persons with disabilities and applicants from all six SHARPER partner countries. Early-career women are encouraged to apply. In addition, SHARPER reserves the right to modify the award process, funding levels, or selection criteria based on programmatic needs and donor guidance. The SHARPER Scientific Committee makes final decisions and is not subject to appeal. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified about the status of the application.



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Research & Innovation Fellowship Grants

Advancing Early-Career Scientific Leadership Through High-Impact Research Placements

About SHARPER Project

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SHARPER consortium invites applications for its **2026 Research & Innovation Fellowship Grants**. These competitive awards aim to strengthen scientific leadership among **early-career African researchers** by supporting research-focused placements in world-class academic or commercial institutions.

This initiative aligns with SHARPER's mission to nurture a new generation of African scientists equipped to drive innovation, strengthen health systems, and contribute to Africa's pandemic preparedness and response capabilities.

About the Grants

These **Research & Innovation Grants** are designed to enable early-career researchers to:

- Acquire advanced, specialised technical skills
- Access cutting-edge technologies, laboratories, and analytic platforms

- Build international or regional scientific networks.
- Strengthen collaborative links between African institutions and global centres of excellence.
- Contribute to scientific innovation that directly enhances epidemic and pandemic sciences on the continent.

Placements may be carried out in **leading academic institutions, research organisations, public health agencies, or commercial biotechnology/innovation entities**, either **within Africa or internationally**.

Grant Size and Number of Awards

- **In 2026, 3 Research & Innovation Fellowship Grants will be awarded: one each from Kenya, Nigeria, and Malawi.**
- **Award value:** Approximately **USD \$40,000** (inclusive of grant management and administrative support costs) per award
- **Costs will cover:**
 - Travel (airfare and local transport)
 - Subsistence/living expenses
 - Bench fees/laboratory access costs
 - Open-access publishing fees
- **Placement duration:** Typically, **6 months** (justified within proposal)

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Early-career researcher (within 0–7 years post-PhD or equivalent research qualification; or a mid-level research officer/scientist transitioning to independence)
2. Affiliated with an African academic, research, public health, or industry institution
3. Working in any area relevant to epidemic and pandemic sciences, including but not limited to:
 - Health systems resilience
 - Social and behavioural aspects of epidemic preparedness
 - Ethical and human rights perspectives in pandemic preparedness
 - Dissemination and uptake of health research
 - Community-centred preparedness and response

- o Decolonial perspectives on health systems strengthening in Africa
 - o Outbreak analytics and modelling
 - o One Health and Environmental Determinants
 - o Clinical or operational research
 - o Diagnostics, surveillance, or laboratory systems
 - o Community-centred preparedness and response
4. Demonstrated capacity to complete the proposed project within the grant duration.
 - 5.. Confirmation or letter of interest from prospective host institution must be provided.
 6. Show commitment to producing publishable scientific outputs, preferably on **Open Research Africa (ORA) and any other databases**. Grantees will be expected to develop one scholarly publication from their experience.

Priority will be given to Proposals that:

- Demonstrate **innovation**, creativity, or a novel methodological approach
- Address **locally relevant challenges** in epidemic/pandemic preparedness.
- Foster **cross-disciplinary collaboration**.
- Strengthen **equity**, including youth and women-led research.
- Have the potential for **scalability, policy relevance**, or integration into public health systems.
- Contribute to workforce development in Africa's scientific ecosystem.

Required Application Materials

Applicants must submit the following:

6. **Concept Note (2–3 pages)** including:
 - o Project title
 - o Background and rationale
 - o Statement of the innovative or transformative idea
 - o Research objectives and expected outcomes

- Methods and activities
 - Timeline (6–12 months)
 - Expected outputs and dissemination plan
7. **Budget (max \$40,000)** with justification in a spreadsheet. Budget should include International and local travel related to the placement (10%), accommodation and subsistence during the placement period (10%), personnel (25%), bench fees or institutional access charges/laboratory use/equipment (35%), dissemination cost (10%), open-access publication and data-sharing (10%). A sample of the budget spreadsheet will be shared. The budget categories may be adjusted with clear justification depending on project needs, provided the total requested amount does not exceed the maximum award ceiling.
 8. **CV (max 3 pages)** for the PI and key team members.
 9. **Letter of institutional affiliation/support.**
 10. **Recommendation from a mentor.**

Deliverables

Awardees are required to:

- Submit a **final project report** within one month of project completion.
- Prepare and publish at least one **manuscript, policy brief, or dataset** on **Open Research Africa**.
- Participate in SHARPER EPSILON knowledge-sharing events.
- **How to Apply**

Applications should be submitted electronically via:

[\[sharperproject.com\]](https://sharperproject.com)

Deadline for submission: [\[30thSeptember 2026\]](#)

Review and Selection Procedures

Applications will undergo a **competitive, peer-reviewed assessment** based on:

- Scientific merit
- Innovation
- Feasibility

- Relevance to epidemic/pandemic preparedness
- Potential for impact
- Applicant's career stage and development needs

Award Timeline

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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Scientific Exchange Awards (2026 Cohort)

About the SHARPER Project

The Strengthening Health Systems Capacity in Africa for Pandemic Equity and Responsiveness (SHARPER) project is a consortium of six African institutions from Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN), Cameroon; Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHS), Malawi; Tropical Institute of Community Health (TICH), Kenya; University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria; Afna Ya Haki, Uganda; and University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa. The goal of SHARPER is to strengthen health research systems for ethical, equitable, and rights-based pandemic responsiveness, grounded in African values. SHARPER is funded under the Epidemic and Pandemic Science Innovation & Leadership Networks (EPSILON) Initiative, which aims to empower African countries to build pandemic preparedness and prevent inequities, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. EPSILON is a collaboration among the Science for Africa Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya; the Pandemic Sciences Institute, University of Oxford, UK; and the Mastercard Foundation, Canada.

The *SHARPER'S* Programme, under the EPSILON Network, is pleased to announce a **Call for Applications** for the **Short Scientific Exchange Awards** for early-career researchers across SHARPER's partner institutions.

These awards aim to foster collaborative learning, strengthen scientific capacity, and promote cross-institutional knowledge exchange in epidemic and pandemic sciences across Africa.

About Short Scientific Exchange Awards

The **Short Scientific Exchange Awards** are designed to support *brief research and innovation-focused scientific placements* between institutions within the SHARPER consortium and the broader EPSILON network.

The exchanges will:

- Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration
- Promote skill acquisition through hands-on exposure.
- Support Afrocentric and context-appropriate research practice.
- Enhance sustainable scientific development across African research institutions.

Grant Size and Number of Awards

A total of **2 awards**, each valued at **USD 10,000** (including grant management and administrative support costs), will be available. These awards will cover the costs of a **single individual** undertaking a scientific exchange visit for **up to six weeks**.

In 2026, two awards will be made: one from Kenya and one from Nigeria.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must:

- Be **early-career researchers** (students, junior faculty, postdoctoral fellows, or research officers within 10 years of their last degree).
- Be currently affiliated with a SHARPER or EPSILON member institution.
- Working in any area relevant to epidemic and pandemic sciences, including but not limited to:
 - Health systems resilience
 - Social and behavioural aspects of epidemic preparedness
 - Ethical and human rights perspectives in pandemic preparedness
 - Dissemination and uptake of health research
 - Community-centred preparedness and response
 - Decolonial perspectives on health systems strengthening in Africa
 - Outbreak analytics and modelling
 - One Health and environmental determinants
 - Clinical or operational research
 - Diagnostics, surveillance, or laboratory systems
- Demonstrated capacity to complete the proposed project within the grant duration.
- Provide proof of approval from their home institution to participate in the exchange.
- Submit a *letter of support* from the host institution confirming willingness to host.

Priority will be given to Proposals that:

- Address **locally relevant challenges** in epidemic/pandemic preparedness.
- Foster **cross-disciplinary collaboration**.
- Strengthen **equity**, including youth and women-led research.
- Contribute to workforce development in Africa's scientific ecosystem.

Required Application Materials

Applicants must submit the following:

Concept Note (3–4 pages) including:

- Concept title
 - Background and rationale
 - The application should address the following areas:
 - i. Knowledge and skills to be acquired
 - ii. Plan for sharing knowledge and skills
 - iii. How participation will strengthen the goals of SHARPER
 - iv. How participation will strengthen capacity in the applicant's home institution
 - v. The dissemination activities to be undertaken afterwards
 - vi. How participation will strengthen the applicant's career development
 - vii. How participation will strengthen equity in collaborative efforts to build health system preparedness for future pandemics
 - Timeline (6 weeks)
 - Expected outputs and dissemination plan
1. **Budget (max \$10,000)** with justification in a spreadsheet. The budget should include International and local travel related to the placement (40%), accommodation and subsistence during the placement period (45%), dissemination costs (10%), and open-access publication and data sharing (5%). A sample of the budget spreadsheet will be shared. The budget categories may be adjusted with clear justification depending on project needs, provided the total requested amount does not exceed the maximum award ceiling.

CV (max 3 pages) for the PI and key team members.

Letter of institutional affiliation/support.

Recommendation from a mentor.

Deliverables

Awardees are required to:

- Submit a **final project report** within one month of project completion.
- Prepare and publish at least one **manuscript, policy brief, or dataset** on **Open Research Africa**.
- Participate in SHARPER EPSILON knowledge-sharing events.

How to Apply

Applications should be submitted electronically via:

[\[sharperproject.com\]](https://sharperproject.com)

Deadline for submission: [\[30th September 2026\]](#)

Review and Selection Procedures

Applications will undergo a **competitive, peer-reviewed assessment** based on:

- Scientific merit
- Innovation
- Feasibility
- Relevance to SHARPER's goal
- Potential for impact
- Applicant's career stage and development needs

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