



Request for Proposals

Lerumo Intellectual Support Program

Background

Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA) understands that the pressure on South African academics to raise external funds in support of their research is growing. This pressure lies on top of both 'publish or perish' and research impact considerations. At the same time, ERSA is transforming.

ERSA seeks to be an important strategic partner to the academic community looking to pursue relevant economic research, strengthen international relationships and develop new and flexible research ideas and networks. Thus, ERSA is rolling out its 'Lerumo (Spear) Intellectual Support Program' (LISP) through its research committee and is requesting proposals.

Lerumo Intellectual Support Program

ERSA understands that research benefits from multiple contributors, including those from the public sector, the private sector, as well as local and international institutions. Creating research partnerships, developing new data and/or leading-edge research is time-consuming; it is also potentially costly and risky. To raise serious research funding requires innovative, but well-founded, project proposals and strong relationships with various potential funders and stakeholders.

Through LISP, ERSA is looking to position itself as a strategic partner to the academic community. LISP can support the development of large research projects that have the potential to shape economic policy and have academic salience. The intention is to play a catalytic role through the provision of 'venture' funding that academics can leverage towards new ideas, additional funds, further opportunities for themselves, colleagues, students and researchers at various institutions, to pursue more impactful

research over the longer term. In our view, impact implies relevance for society, the policy sector and the academe.

Intellectual support is assumed to lead to academic and policy/industry/societal contributions (hereafter, “policy”), underpinned by quality. Therefore, proposals should delineate a clear contribution to the broader academic literature, including the relevant policy question(s) to be addressed by the research. The academic contribution should be placed into a larger context that pushes the boundaries of our knowledge.

In exchange for support, the working papers derived from the LISP research, should be submitted to the Economic Research Southern Africa Working Paper Series. It is further expected that at least one policy paper, inclusive of an executive summary “policy brief”, will also be submitted. The research itself, is to be owned by the researcher, although ERSA reserves the right to market and communicate results from the research to the broader academic and policy community. It is also presumed that a primary goal of undertaking research is the development of a research profile, inclusive of publications in top international journals. Thus, potential publication outlets are an important component of the proposal process. We suggest the inclusion of three journal possibilities and appropriate motivation for those choices.

Research Themes

For this call, we are requesting proposals that undertaking research that is relevant to any of ERSA’s primary research themes. These are:

- Macroeconomic Policy Co-Ordination;
- Growth, Development and Structural Constraints;
- Macroeconomic Analysis Models;
- Public Finance; and the
- Policy Implications of Climate Change.

Request for Proposals

We are currently requesting proposals. Our preference is for those proposals to focus on relatively obvious economic concerns in the country: economic growth, jobs and climate change. However, we are open to considering proposals in other areas that fit within the goals of LISP.

Proposals should either be submitted by academics employed full-time by South African academic institutions or include South African academics as equal partners in the research. It is expected that the proposals will be underscored by collaborations that cross boundaries, such as those separating macro from micro, economics from other natural and social sciences, one university from another and academics from either policymakers or industry experts, and, of course, experts in one country from experts in another. In principle, proposals that cross multiple boundaries will be considered relatively more favourably. Finally, it is expected that proposals will contain a training component, most likely focused on PhD and postdoctoral researchers.

The proposal should lay out the academic contribution, policy potential (direct and/or indirect) and collaborative potential of the research project. Given that LISP has been designed to help researchers open new avenues of research and new networks of collaborators, proposals are expected to address these two components. Proposals will be judged on their innovation, as well as their likely contribution and potential to grow into something bigger or better.

These areas (innovation, contribution and potential) will be underpinned by policy relevance; possible 'growth' in the proposed research area (for example, arising from the development of new and academically exploitable data or the development of newer analytic methods); and its grounding in clear economic methods and intuition. In addition, the collaborative component of the proposals will be judged on the breadth and depth of collaborators, their participation and appropriateness thereof. Thus, the proposal should clearly explain the contribution of each partner involved.

The proposal should also include a budget. We currently envision funding two to three projects for a period of three to five years. Funds under this RFP are not meant to support academic wages, nor admittedly, is ERSA in a position to provide the substantial level of support that might be required to "fundamentally change the world of economics as we know it." Given the degree of innovation and flexibility we are requesting in these proposals, we are not imposing a strict budget cap. However, to give some guidance, while discussing the RFP process, we often discussed an 80/20

project split, in which ERSA might be able to fund up to 20% of a project that could garner 80% of its support from elsewhere.

Rather, it should be understood from the preceding that ERSA is looking to proposers to be innovative in how ERSA support can be leveraged. Requested support should match the 'Lerumo intention, which is to "open-up" opportunities. Thus, the budget item explanation should clearly and realistically relate to this expectation. Further, it is expected that potential external funding support (through donors or other partners) receives attention in both the proposal and the budget. The budget should be separated between 'start-up' and 'operating' costs, and describe which potential donors and/or partners might be interested to provide co-funding. To outline those funding possibilities, it is also necessary to carefully describe the wider value proposition underpinning the project being proposed.

Rubric

The scientific component of the proposals should contain a brief introduction describing what is to be done in the project, and how it fits within LISP. Proposals should offer a clear review of the state of the art that places the research into context and highlights the potential academic contribution of the project. It should also highlight the research methodology and expected academic outputs (e.g. papers, data etc) arising from the research.

Proposals should also offer a clear discussion of policy relevance that describes the policy context and the likely contribution of this research in addressing a relevant policy problem. This section should also highlight the expected policy output(s) arising from the research – at a minimum, one policy brief is expected. In addition to, or as a substitute, one could also present a clear discussion of industry relevance and/or a clear discussion of societal relevance.

The proposal should also briefly describe the envisioned effect of the research on the development of a new academic cohort, which focuses on the training/skills this new cohort might need, and how the project will build up those skills, including identified candidates, if possible. In our view, a new cohort is most likely developed through PhD

and/or postdoctoral fellow supervision, and that would include co-supervision from academics at international institutions or in other fields.

Finally, the project should incorporate a budget with both a short-term and a long-term focus that separates the LISP contribution from potential additional funding streams, and clarifies how the items are to be used in support of the project and LISP goals.

Although we are still reflecting on the final details and weights, we are leaning towards equal weighting for both the collaborative component and the innovation/academic contribution components of the proposal (at 30% each). We are planning to weight the policy/societal impact at 15%, the budget at 15% and the academic cohort at 10%.

We are also developing a rough submission template, which will be available on the ERSA website. Each submission will require a proposal that addresses the preceding points – please, try to keep proposals under 25 pages double-spaced – and CVs of the participants.

Process

Proposals are due February 28, 2023, although we reserve the right to extend the deadline, if necessary. We plan to hold a discussion for interested parties in either early January, 2023. The call will open on December 15, 2022. An initial review of each proposal to see that it addresses the main components of the RFP will be conducted, and those deemed not to will not be considered further. The remaining proposals will be externally reviewed, and those recommendations will be used by the committee in ranking the proposals. If no proposals are deemed appropriate or to incorporate the main components of the RFP, we reserve the right to request amended proposals from those who have submitted.