

COLLABORATIVE NETWORK FOR VACCINE RESEARCH IN WEST AND EAST AFRICA



KENYA

UGANDA

TANZANIA

SIERRA LEONE

CONNECT-VAX
2026 - 2030

Call for Proposals

August 2026

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Governments of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone, through their respective Science Granting Councils, are jointly launching a Call for Proposals under the CONNECT-VAX initiative. This initiative seeks to strengthen vaccine research, innovation, regulatory science, community engagement and resilient delivery systems. The participating Science Granting Councils (SGCs) are Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), National Research Fund of Kenya (NRF-Kenya), Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), and the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Council (NSTIC-SL) of Sierra Leone. This Call is aligned with national development frameworks such as Uganda Vision 2040, Kenya Vision 2030, Tanzania Development Vision 2050, and Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024 – 2030). It also contributes directly to continental priorities, including the African Union Agenda 2063, the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2034) and the Africa CDC Partnerships for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM).

Despite government and regional interest in biotechnology and health innovation across Africa, the continent still faces critical gaps in local vaccine Research and Development (R&D) capabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed heavy dependence on external vaccine supplies, prompting national and regional efforts such as the establishment of Kenya's BioVax institute to promote self-reliance. National efforts, including the establishment of Kenya's BioVax Institute, demonstrate a growing commitment to vaccine self-reliance and align well with the continental World Health Organisation (WHO), African Region framework for strengthening local production of medicines and vaccines, which seeks to develop local R&D and innovation capabilities. To translate these efforts into actionable, sustainable and evidence-based strategy, this Call treats R&D capacity as a key research priority. This supports Uganda's goal of science and technology-led development, Kenya's ambition to become a regional knowledge hub, Tanzania's human development priorities and the Sierra Leone's on health security agenda. It is also consistent with continental strategies, including Gavi's regional manufacturing strategy and the Partnerships for African Vaccine Manufacturing. This ultimately ensures a more resilient and self-sufficient vaccine ecosystem.

Weak, fragmented regulatory systems hinder timely vaccine development and approval. Although the African Medicines Agency (AMA) and WHO's AVAREF initiative mark progress, national regulatory agencies in the four countries remain under capacitated. For instance, Kenya's Pharmacy and Poisons Board reports only 52% staffing for vaccine regulation functions. Uganda's National Drug Authority (NDA) and Pharmacy Board of Sierra Leone also face constraints in clinical trial oversight and post-market surveillance. Without strong regulatory systems, countries cannot effectively support local vaccine production or participate in regional mutual recognition processes. Research will generate evidence to support regulatory reforms, regional harmonization, and innovative oversight approaches that maintain ethical standards.

Vaccine hesitancy undermines public health progress. In Tanzania, HPV vaccine coverage remains at 50.7%; in Uganda and Sierra Leone, COVID-19 hesitancy stands at 58.6% and 60% respectively, localized resistance disrupted rollout efforts. Misinformation, lack of tailored engagement, and limited trust in health authorities drive these patterns. Understanding the social, cultural, and political determinants of vaccine acceptance—particularly gender, equity, and intersectionality—is essential. This research will inform demand-generation strategies, communication models, and community engagement frameworks tailored to each national context, in line with development priorities to improve health-seeking behaviours and service

delivery. Beyond vaccine acceptance, effective immunisation also depends on resilient vaccine delivery systems. Infrastructure challenges—including cold chain limitations, data system weaknesses, and human resource shortages—are widespread in rural and peri-urban areas. For instance, Uganda faces a shortage of trained vaccinators and underutilization of digital tools for logistics. Research under this priority will identify cost-effective delivery strategies, leverage digital health platforms, and develop sustainable human resource models to ensure equitable access. This priority directly supports national development goals focused on improving health infrastructure and service delivery at the grassroots level.

The four countries are participating in the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI) which seeks to enhance the capacity of participating councils to support research and evidence-based policies that contribute to socio-economic development across sub-Saharan Africa. With support from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the four countries participating in the SGCI are undertaking a research project aimed at strengthening the capacity of national science councils to fund and promote research and use evidence to inform policies that advance socio-economic development across sub-Saharan Africa. Under SGCI's framework, the four granting Councils have secured a multilateral grant to fund projects that align with the following thematic areas:

1. Vaccine Research and Development Capacity
2. Vaccine Regulatory Harmonization
3. Vaccine Communication
4. Vaccine Delivery Systems

Successful applicants are expected to submit proposals to the Uganda National Council for science and technology (UNCST). Each Council has received funding of which will be allocated to seven Major cross-country vaccine research projects and two Early Career research projects, with proposals due by 30th September 2026 and notification of successful applicants by 15th November 2026. The research projects are expected to be completed within 36 months. For proposal guidelines, applicants are encouraged to visit www.nrf.go.ke (Kenya), www.uncst.go.ug (Uganda); www.costech.or.tz; (Tanzania); and www.mthe.gov.sl (Sierra Leone)

2.0 RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE JOINT CALL

Despite improvements in health systems, African countries continue to face significant challenges in vaccine research, development and deployment. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed critical weaknesses, including dependence on external vaccine supplies, limited local manufacturing capacity, fragmented regulatory systems, inadequate research infrastructure, weak research-to-policy linkages, and shortages of skilled biomedical personnel. Vaccine uptake is further constrained by misinformation, mistrust, and other socio-cultural factors. This Call seeks to address these challenges through regional collaborative research. The pandemic also accelerated efforts toward vaccine self-reliance, driving political commitment and reforms to strengthen national and regional vaccine R&D ecosystems. In Uganda, institutions such as the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) and the Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI) lead vaccine research efforts. In 2023, the Science, Technology and Innovation Secretariat–Office of the President (STI-OP) launched initiatives to develop a “pathogen economy” to improve coordination of health technologies and vaccine production. However, challenges remain, including limited vaccine research capacity, inadequate cold-chain infrastructure, and weak communication systems for vaccine uptake. Uganda has also undertaken a feasibility study on mRNA vaccine production under the African Union's Partnerships for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM).

In Sierra Leone, vaccine research capacity is recovering following the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak, but progress is constrained by regulatory delays, vaccine hesitancy, and logistical challenges in remote areas. A 2022 UNICEF survey found that 32% of caregivers distrusted vaccines, reflecting persistent historical inequities. Kenya has a strong vaccine research ecosystem but continues to face cold-chain and last-mile delivery challenges, including a reported 15% vaccine stock-out rate in 2023. Tanzania’s growing vaccine research landscape, supported by international partnerships, is focused on expanding clinical trial infrastructure and accelerating regulatory approvals through mechanisms such as the WHO Collaborative Registration Procedure. However, progress remains constrained by vaccine hesitancy, limited research funding, inadequate laboratory capacity and shortages of specialized personnel. The Joint Vaccine Research Call will support research that addresses these systemic barriers and strengthens vaccine innovation, production, delivery, regulation, and uptake across participating countries.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

The objective is to enhance vaccine innovation, access, and resilience across the participating countries in East and West Africa. Specifically, the Call aims:

- a. To assess and enhance vaccine research and development (R&D) capacity and activities.
- b. To analyse and improve the regulatory environment governing vaccine research, development and deployment.
- c. To investigate and address drivers of vaccine acceptance, hesitancy, and demand generation; and
- d. To identify and optimize vaccine delivery systems in East and West Africa, including logistics, cold chain, human resources, and data management.

Each objective is directly tied to critical development challenges in the four countries and addresses long-standing barriers to sustainable immunization systems.

4.0 PRIORITY AREAS

The CONNECT-VAX consortium (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone) invites multi-country research proposals addressing priority challenges in vaccine innovation ecosystems. This Call supports research across **four strategic pillars**, each with defined sub-themes

Pillar 1: Vaccine R&D Capacity

Goal: Strengthen local vaccine research, development and manufacturing capabilities across the consortium.

Sub-Theme	Research Focus Areas
1.1 Research Infrastructure & Human Capital	Laboratory and clinical trial site strengthening; workforce development in vaccinology, immunology, and bioprocess engineering; training curricula and fellowship programs
1.2 Vaccine Innovation & Technology Platforms	mRNA and viral vector platform development; next-generation vaccine design; antigen discovery and optimization for endemic diseases (e.g., Rift Valley Fever, dengue, malaria)
1.3 Local Manufacturing & Technology Transfer	Fill-and-finish capacity development; GMP facility requirements; technology transfer models (South–South, PPPs); quality assurance systems; economic sustainability
1.4 Pathogen Surveillance & Translational Research	Genomic surveillance integration with vaccine design; bioinformatics capacity; preclinical-to-clinical translation pipelines; regional disease burden data

Pillar 2: Regulatory Harmonization

Goal: Strengthen regulatory systems and advance regional harmonization to accelerate vaccine development, approval and deployment.

Sub-Theme	Research Focus Areas
2.1 Regulatory Systems Strengthening	National regulatory authority capacity assessments; regulatory science training; digital submission systems; workforce development for regulatory professionals
2.2 Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks	Mutual recognition pathways for EAC/AMA alignment; joint dossier review mechanisms; quality assurance standardization; reliance frameworks
2.3 Clinical Trial & Ethics Review Coordination	Multi-country trial protocol harmonization; joint ethics review mechanisms; research ethics committee capacity building; informed consent standardization
2.4 Vaccine Safety & Post-Market Surveillance	Pharmacovigilance system strengthening; cross-country adverse event data sharing; signal detection and response protocols; regional safety databases

Pillar 3: Vaccine Acceptance

Goal: Understand and address drivers of vaccine hesitancy to build community trust and improve uptake.

Sub-Theme	Research Focus Areas
3.1 Drivers of Vaccine Hesitancy & Confidence	Social, cultural, and behavioral determinants; gender dynamics in household decision-making; cross-country comparative analyses; longitudinal attitude tracking
3.2 Community Engagement & Trust Building	Community Health Workers (CHWs) and community leader engagement models; faith-based and traditional authority partnerships; participatory research approaches; trust measurement tools
3.3 Risk Communication & Misinformation Management	Digital platform strategies for vaccine literacy; misinformation monitoring and counter-messaging; health worker communication training; media engagement frameworks
3.4 Equity & Inclusion in Vaccine Uptake	Barriers affecting marginalized populations; gender-responsive demand generation; youth-focused strategies; disability-inclusive vaccine access

Pillar 4: Vaccine Delivery Systems

Goal: Optimize vaccine delivery through innovative logistics, digital solutions, and resilient health systems.

Sub-Theme	Research Focus Areas
4.1 Cold Chain & Supply Chain Strengthening	Solar-powered and passive cold chain technologies; inventory management optimization; wastage reduction strategies; cross-border supply coordination
4.2 Last-Mile Delivery & Access	Drone and innovative logistics for remote areas; mobile/outreach vaccination models; community health worker deployment; hard-to-reach population strategies
4.3 Digital Health & Logistics Innovations	Digital tracking and forecasting systems; appointment reminder platforms; real-time stock monitoring; data interoperability across countries

4.4 Health System Integration & Resilience

Integration with primary healthcare; emergency preparedness for outbreak response; sustainable human resource models; health system strengthening for routine immunization

5.0. FUNDING ALLOCATION

The projects may be funded to a maximum period of 36 months. Funding will support research, training, equipment, travel, and dissemination. A total of USD1,191,351 has been allocated for competitive sub-grants to support collaborative research projects under this Call for Proposals. The funding will be distributed across two categories of grants:

- a. *A Large Collaborative Research Grant* is a major multi-country, multi-institutional and multidisciplinary research award designed to support collaborative vaccine efforts that require complementary expertise, shared infrastructure, and coordinated implementation across multiple institutions. These projects will support high-quality, multidisciplinary research aligned with the objectives of the CONNECT-VAX project. Each proposal must be led by a Principal Investigator and 3 co-investigators from the other 3 participating countries. Collaboration should demonstrate clear scientific complementarity and equitable participation among partners. Up to seven (7) Large Collaborative Research Grants will be awarded. Each project may receive funding of up to USD 156,750 for a project duration not exceeding 36 months.
- b. *Early Career Research Grants* is a capacity-strengthening research award intended to support emerging researchers in establishing independent research careers while contributing to the objectives of the CONNECT-VAX project. The Principal Investigator will have earned a PhD within the last five (5) years and be less than 45yrs age at the time of application. Each Early Career Research Grant must include collaborators from all the participating countries and at least one senior researcher serving as a mentor to provide scientific guidance and support throughout project implementation. Up to two (2) Early Career Research Grants will be awarded. Each project may receive funding of up to USD 47,000 for a project duration not exceeding 36 months.

Each collaborative proposal shall comprise four (4) country-specific budget components, corresponding to the participating research teams in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone. Applicants must clearly indicate the budget allocated to each country, ensuring that all costs are directly linked to activities implemented within that country. Each participating SGC will be responsible for administering the funds allocated to the research team(s) in its respective country, in accordance with its national financial management and grant administration procedures. All research grants will be awarded through a competitive, merit-based selection process, following an independent scientific review and evaluation of eligible proposals.

The budget should include detailed justifications/budget notes for each line item in the detailed budget spreadsheet, following the guidelines in this section. Key researchers' roles and the percentage of time (man-hour) they will devote to the project must be clarified. The research grant does not cover salaries for project team members, but man-hours devoted to the project work. Budget rates should align with the policies of the respective institutions hosting the PI/Co-PI. These collaborative research projects will be implemented over a period not exceeding thirty-six (36) months. Permissible budget items include:

- a) Graduate Training at PhD and master's level
- b) Material costs directly linked to the research project, such as durable materials, expendable items, field expenses, travel costs, or third-party charges.

- c) Direct costs associated with the use of research infrastructure.
- d) Costs for organizing conferences and workshops related to the funded research.
- e) Costs for national and international cooperation and networking activities are directly associated with the funded research.

Note:

- a) Personnel Costs for research team members (not exceeding 10% of the total requested budget), overheads (not exceeding 7% of the total project budget) and stipend for the students are also eligible costs.
- b) Applicants' host institutions will be required to co-fund (either in cash or kind) the total budget of the project and are expected to commit in writing.
- c) The selection of students should also reflect the collaboration between Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. In addition, teams should consider gender, equity and inclusivity.
- d) The researchers should submit budgets in USD to their respective Councils.

6.0. ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must be affiliated with recognized institutions. Each proposal must include a PI and Co-PI from at least two different countries. Teams must be multidisciplinary and gender responsive. The eligibility criteria are as follows:

For the Large Collaborative Research Grants:

- a) Each proposal must involve a research team consisting of members from all the participating countries led by a PI from one country and 3 co-PIs from the other countries. The PI will be responsible for the overall project's technical and administrative coordination, as well as the timely delivery of technical and financial reports.
- b) A strong multidisciplinary and collaborative approach among researchers and institutions is encouraged.
- c) Projects should demonstrate gender and inclusivity responsiveness in team composition, student selection, methodology, data management, and dissemination strategies.
- d) Lead applicants must be holders of PhD or equivalent from public/ private research and development higher learning institution.
- e) The research project team must include researchers from public/private higher learning institutions and R&D institutions legally registered either in Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone or Kenya
- f) Inclusion of other collaborations in the research project is allowed but their role in the project should be clear.
- g) Letters of support from the participating institutions in the country of the PI and Co-PI are required. Proposals without these letters will not be considered.
- h) The grant will fund only research projects in the focus areas of: (a) Vaccine Research and Development; (b) Vaccine Regulation; (c) Vaccine Acceptance; (d) Vaccine Logistics
- i) Projects must include a substantive capacity-building component that contributes to developing research excellence, leadership, technical expertise, and long-term institutional sustainability.
- j) All applicants and research team members must comply with the applicable research governance, registration, and regulatory requirements of their respective countries. Where national researcher registration is mandatory, evidence of registration—including the relevant registration number(s)—must be provided in the application

form. Failure to meet the applicable national requirements may result in disqualification of the application.

For the Early Career Research Grants:

- a) The eligibility requirements outlined in Sections (b), (c) and (e) – (j) above shall apply to applicants.
- b) The Principal Investigator (PI) shall be an Early Career Researcher (ECR) who obtained a PhD within the last five (5) years and is not more than forty-five (45) years of age at the time of application.
- c) The proposed research team shall comprise eligible researchers from all participating CONNECT-VAX countries, demonstrating meaningful collaboration and shared scientific leadership.
- d) The research team shall include at least one experienced senior researcher who will serve as a mentor, providing scientific guidance, career development support, and oversight to the Early Career Researcher(s) throughout the project.

7.0 PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Full proposals must include project description, methodology, expected outcomes, team composition, and detailed budget. Researchers must adhere to these requirements with failure to comply resulting into proposal rejection. Submission of a research proposal does not guarantee funding. Research and outreach projects demonstrating high impact at the grassroots level within the project timeline and at a reasonable cost will be prioritized. Applicants should use the Times New Roman font, size 12, with 1.5-line spacing using the Research Proposal Application Template available at www.uncst.go.ug. The Application Form should be jointly completed by both the PI and Co-PI from the different countries. This application form should be accompanied by relevant attachments. A Cover letter highlighting summary of the related previous research work or assignments in vaccine research will be prepared. The PI should provide a summary of the previous related research project. In addition to providing motivation for funding support, the PI should attach a completed Project Proposal. The Researchers' Project Proposals should include the following information.

- a. *Project Abstract (maximum 300 words)*
- b. *Project Title, Acronym,*
- c. *Background and Justification. Include contribtin to national, regoinal and international priorities (maximum 1000 words)*
- d. *Overall Objective and Specific Objectives (maximum 200 words)*
- e. *Research Methodology (maximum 2000 words)*
- f. *Work Plan and Implementation Timeline (maximum 500 words)*
- g. *Expected Outputs, Outcomes and Impact (maximum 500 words)*
- h. *Work Plan and Implementation Timeline (maximum 500 words)*
- i. *Detailed Budget and Budget Justification (maximum 600 words)*
- j. *Risk Assessment and Mitigation Measures (maximum 200 words)*
- k. *Project Impact and contribution to vaccine security (maximum 200 words)*
- l. *Ethical, Regulatory and Biosafety Considerations (where applicable) (maximum 200 words)*
- m. *Knowledge Translation, Dissemination and Policy Uptake (maximum 500 words)*
- n. *Mandatory Supporting Documents*
- o. *Short Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of Key Personnel (2 page per CV)*

8.0 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Applicants must address, where applicable, the following cross-cutting considerations

a) Gender Equity and Inclusivity

The four SGC participating in this Call aim to support gender-responsive and inclusive research projects by promoting (1) the equality and status of women in research (which includes women in leading or participating in research) (2) the sex, gender and inclusivity dimension in the design of research and content. Applicants must integrate gender equality, diversity, and inclusion throughout the research design, implementation, and evaluation. Proposals should demonstrate how sex as a biological variable and gender as a social determinant have been considered in the research questions, methodology, analysis, and expected outcomes, considering intersectionality and its implications for equitable and meaningful research. Research teams should promote gender-balanced participation, with a target of at least 40% representation of the underrepresented gender, while ensuring equal opportunities in project leadership and implementation. Proposals should also consider the inclusion of early-career researchers, persons with disabilities (PWDs), geographically underserved populations, and other vulnerable groups.

b) Results and Dissemination

Applicants must clearly define expected outputs from the research project and describe the strategy for disseminating findings. The target audience and beneficiaries should be identified by the applicant, and plans for using research results to influence policy and practice should be outlined. Different dissemination platforms and media engagements should be described, demonstrating how the research findings will reach a broad audience.

c) Open Science and Responsible Data Sharing

Open Science is a priority for this funding Call. Applicants are expected to integrate Open Science principles throughout the research lifecycle by making research outputs openly available through Open Access platforms and repositories and promoting accessible, transparent, and reusable research. The Call aims to foster scientific collaboration, open knowledge sharing, and inclusive research practices by engaging stakeholders beyond the scientific community and communicating research outputs in accessible ways, including the use of appropriate languages and metadata to reach local communities. Research proposals should include a budget for knowledge dissemination activities, such as workshops, stakeholder forums, or policy dialogues, to facilitate the sharing of research findings with scientific, policy, and community audiences. In addition, the proposed Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework should demonstrate how Open Science principles will be implemented, including mechanisms for knowledge exchange and resource sharing among participating countries—Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Kenya.

d) Research Integrity

Applicants must adhere to research integrity principles, obtaining ethical clearance from their institutional Research Ethics Committees (RECs). A Research Permit from the relevant regulatory agencies is mandatory and should be budgeted for. If the project involves controlled substances, a Controlled Substance Registration Certificate must be obtained.

e) Team Composition from Applicant Organizations

All significant contributors to the intellectual direction of the research and those responsible for project tasks should be listed. Team members should include their field of expertise. A maximum two-page CV for all the research team members must be included.

f) Project Governance

Briefly describe the governance structure of the project, including the composition and qualifications of the research team, their roles, and any planned partnerships with universities or research institutes. The involvement of the private sector or beneficiaries in the design, management, and execution of the project should be clarified. The role of university or

institute management and how the governance structure may influence the success of the project should be discussed.

g) Proposed Project Timeline

Provide a chart outlining key activities, timelines, and milestones within a period not exceeding 36 months.

h) Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

UNCST, NRF-Kenya, COSTECH and NCST-Sierra Leone, in collaboration with host institutions from partner countries will be responsible for MEL. Successful applicants will be provided with MEL templates.

Applicants should clearly demonstrate how these cross-cutting considerations have been integrated throughout the proposal rather than treated as stand-alone compliance requirements. The extent to which cross-cutting issues are appropriately addressed may be considered during the technical evaluation of proposals.

9.0 PROPOSAL REVIEW PROCESS

Selection will include administrative screening, technical review, and proposal defense. Evaluation is based on merit, impact, collaboration, and feasibility. The selection of successful proposals will be undertaken jointly by the interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral Scientific Technical Committee. The submitted proposals will undergo an administrative and eligibility check by the Project Joint Call Secretariat who will check for completeness, eligibility, and adherence of proposals to the Call guidelines. The proposals that pass the administrative and eligibility check will then be evaluated by a technical evaluation committee consisting of independent scientific technical peer reviewers from both the academia and industry selected from the four countries. The selected proposals will be required to outline in their submissions a strategy for knowledge management that fosters active engagement of all collaborating partners during project implementation as well as a strategy for disseminating research findings with broader national and international stakeholder groups. The proposals that pass the administrative review will undergo a two-stage technical evaluation process:

- i. Online technical review scoring (75% of total score)
- ii. Proposal defense for the research teams (25% of total score).

The final funding decision shall rest with the participating SGCs in accordance with the agreed CONNECT-VAX governance arrangements. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the review process and, where practicable, provided with reviewer feedback. The review process will be conducted in accordance with the principles of fairness, transparency, impartiality and scientific excellence.

9.1 Assessment Criteria

Peer review and Proposal defense (of research projects) will be conducted in accordance with NRF-Kenya, COSTECH, NCST-Sierra Leone and UNCST policies. Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- a) Relevance to the objectives of the CONNECT-VAX Joint (5%): Alignment with the Call's focus and objectives.
- b) Scientific Excellence and Technical Merit (25%): Innovation, feasibility, log frame, and methodology.
- c) Impact potential (25%): Expected contribution to vaccine policy, awareness, regulation and STISA 2034 Goals.
- d) Quality of Collaboration and Partnership arrangements (10%): Effective partnerships between Ugandan, Kenyan, Tanzanian and Sierra Leonian institutions including plans for collaborating with other relevant organizations and student selection.

- e) Gender and Inclusivity (5%): proposal should be able to show commitment to gender equity and inclusivity such as gender balance in the project team, target beneficiaries, proposed interventions, and Budgets.
- f) Budget Efficiency and Value for Money imperatives (10%): Appropriateness of the budget and justification for amount requested.
- g) Track record of applicants (5%): expertise and experience of individuals or organizations involved in the project; and composition, integration and complementary roles of team members.
- h) Dissemination (5%): A clear research results synthesis and dissemination plan should be included.
- i) Workplan (5%): timelines of planned activities
- j) Results Indicators (5%): Quality of the research results indicators for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Each proposal will be assessed by a minimum of three (3) external expert reviewers and evaluators, who will assign a numerical score for each of the three categories of peer review and evaluation as above mentioned. Only proposals that satisfy all eligibility requirements will proceed to technical assessment. Assessment decisions will be based on the overall quality, relevance and potential impact of the proposal, taking into account the objectives of the CONNECT-VAX Joint Call. The funding decision made by the review team will be final. NRF-Kenya, UNCST, COSTECH and NCST-Sierra Leone reserve the right to cancel the process at any time without prior notice and/or at its discretion to grant all or none of the awards under this Call. Moreover, grants will only be awarded subject to the availability of funding.

9.2 Awards

Successful applicants will be issued an award letter containing details of the funding, after which contractual agreements will be drawn up. Incorrect information on the application form, costs that do not adhere to the Call guidelines, and negotiations with institutions regarding the terms and conditions of the funding can lead to contracting delays.

10. SUBMISSION PROCESS AND KEY TIMELINES

10.1 Submission process

Please pay due regard to the following:

- Applications must be submitted electronically through the designated submission platform at <https://www.nrims.uncst.go.ug> Joint Application form no later than the published submission deadline. All submission deadlines refer to East Africa Time (EAT).
- You must first create an account on the online system to be able to proceed.
- Applications should be submitted in English.
- Incomplete or late applications may not be considered. All mandatory supporting documents must accompany the proposal at the time of submission.
- Applicants are responsible for ensuring that proposals are complete, accurate and submitted before the deadline.
- The application system will automatically close by the deadline and no new submissions will be allowed.
- Only one application per PI and co-PI can be submitted, i.e. a PI or Co-PI cannot be a PI or Co-PI in any other submission.
- Only submissions made through the online system will be accepted.
- Only applications approved by PI and Co-PI's research institutions and supported by all the collaborating partner institutions will be accepted.

- The application package should include: the full proposal, a PI's cover letter, letters of support from all collaborating institutions, and the CVs of all the research team members.
- All electronic attachments should be in pdf format (proposal, logical framework, CVs, letters of submission and support put together in one pdf document). Budgets to be submitted in both pdf and excel formats.
- All applications will be reviewed based on quality and merit. A full proposal template can be downloaded from the following links:
 - <https://www.nrims.uncst.go.ug/>

All proposals will be received and processed confidentially, respecting intellectual property rights. All applicants will be notified of the outcome following completion of the review process.

10.2 Key Timelines

Application Open:	14 th August 2026
Application Deadline	14 th October 2026 at 23:59
Information Session Webinar	25 th August 2026 at 14:00 EAT
Network and Team Building Webinar	28 th August 2026 at 14:00 EAT
Review and Shortlisting	14 th October 2026 to 28 th October 2026
Viva Voce:	3 rd – 10 th November 2026
Award Date:	16 th November 2026

Note: NRF-Kenya, COSTECH, UNCST and NCST-Sierra Leone reserve the right to change the above-mentioned dates at any stage

The participating Science Granting Councils reserve the right to amend the timetable where necessary. Any changes will be communicated through the official CONNECT-VAX communication channels.

11.0 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The CONNECT-VAX Joint Call is expected to contribute to:

- Outcome 1: Strengthened Research - strengthened national and regional vaccine research capacity.
- Outcome 2: Partnerships - Sustainable multi-country research partnerships
- Outcome 3: Policy – Evidence-informed policy and decision-making
- Outcome 4: Innovation - Vaccine research, innovation and implementation
- Outcome 5: Capacity building – Institutional and human capacity strengthening.

The project seeks to establish long-term scientific partnerships that extend beyond the duration of individual research grants. Research findings are expected to contribute to improved policy, practice and regional knowledge exchange.

12.0 FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

Researchers should direct inquiries as follows:

UGANDA	
Uganda National Council for Science and Technology	SGLI Coordinator Dr. Steven Sebbale sssebbale@gmail.com (Office Tel: +256 (0) 414 705 534). Grants and Call related matters Ms. Agwang Florence f.agwang@uncst.go.ug (Office Tel: +256 (0) 414 705 545) ICT related enquiries Mr. Collins Mwesigwa c.mwesigwa@uncst.go.ug (Office Tel: +256 (0) 414 705 512).
KENYA	
National Research Fund – Kenya	SGLI Coordinator Mr. Jacob Njagih ijnagih@nrf.go.ke (Tel: +254 721 281 207). Grants and Call related matters Ms. Jackline Muyalo jmuyalo@nrf.go.ke (Tel: +254 712 444 853). ICT related enquiries Laura Odhiambo lodhiambo@nrf.go.ke (Tel: +254 708 759 450).
SIERRA LEONE	
National Science, Technology and Innovation Council - Sierra Leone	SGLI Coordinator Dr Thomas Phillip Songu tsongu@njala.edu.sl (Tel: +232 79453 322) Grants and Call related matters Dr. Alex Blanshard alex.blanshard@yahoo.co.uk; (Tel: +232 80321903) ICT related enquiries Mr. Lansana Jusu-Wai Sawi lansanajusuwai.sawi@njala.edu.sl (Tel: +232 76811846) Mr Emmanuel Kamanda emmanuelkamanda1225@gmail.com; (Tel: +232 76685170)
TANZANIA	
Tanzania Commission of Science and Technology (COSTECH)	SGLI Coordinator Dr. Bugwesa Zablon Katale bugwesa.katale@costech.or.tz; (Tel. +255 784687 178) Grants and Call related matters Dr. Paulo Ochanga paulo.ochanga@costech.or.tz; (Tel: +255 755786023) ICT related enquiries Mr. Daudi Mboma daudi.mboma@costech.or.tz; (Tel: +255 754316162)

The CONNECT-VAX Partner SGCs reserve the right, at their sole discretion, to amend, clarify or extend this Call for Proposals or any aspect of the application, review, selection, or award process without incurring any liability to applicants. Submission of an application does not constitute a commitment by the Partner Councils to fund any proposal. Any amendments

or updates to this Call will be communicated through the official websites and communication channels of the participating SGCs.