



GLOBAL
RESILIENCE
PARTNERSHIP

SARA
SOUTHERN AFRICAN
RESILIENCE ACADEMY



Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
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CST
Centre for
Sustainability Transitions

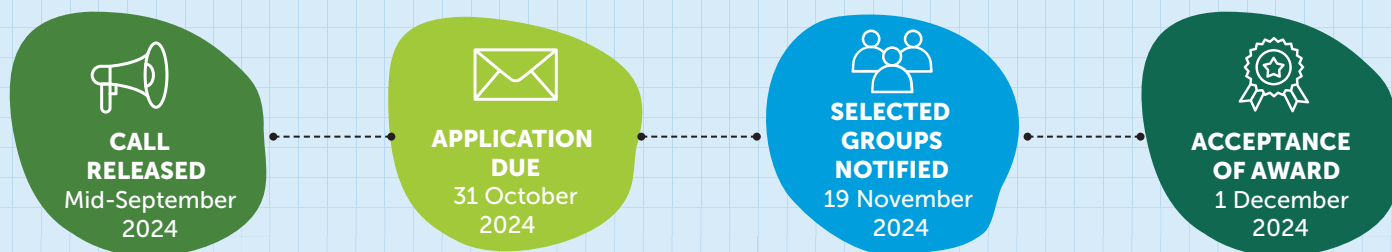
CALL FOR TRANSDISCIPLINARY
WORKING GROUPS 2025 - 2027

TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS to resilient + sustainable futures

SUMMARY

- We invite applications for transdisciplinary working groups to undertake synthesis projects, under the theme of “Transformative Pathways to Resilient and Sustainable Futures”, that elevates and showcases insights and perspectives from the Southern African region.
- Working groups (5-8 members each) are expected to be a diverse collaboration of complementary skills between academic researchers, practitioners, and those working across the science-policy-practice interface.
- Members should be primarily based in the southern African region, and represent at least two southern African countries
- Working groups are expected to produce an academic output such as a journal article or other relevant peer-reviewed publication. Additionally, working groups, with support from SARA, will be expected to undertake an engagement process, aiming to strategically influence policy and implementation. This may entail producing knowledge products aimed at policy and practitioner audiences or strategically facilitating or engaging in a relevant policy process.
- SARA offers participants the opportunity to join a diverse community of experts, as well as offering skills-building opportunities (e.g. scientific communication clinics), networking, mentorship and a clear research-to-impact pathway.
- SARA support will include travel and accommodation for three in-person working group meetings between 2025 and the end of 2027 in South Africa, open access publication fees for the special issue, and funds for the development of key engagement knowledge products and processes.
- Proposals are due on the **31st of October 2024**

Summary of call process



Summary of SARA commitment (2025-2027)



THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN RESILIENCE ACADEMY (SARA)

The aim of SARA is to provide a convening and support space for sharing, learning and co-creating new knowledge amongst inter- and transdisciplinary researchers and practitioners, working on pressing resilience and development challenges across southern Africa.

The academy's goals are to strengthen existing expert networks across researchers, practitioners and boundary-spanning actors, expand collaboration, and facilitate the co-production of policy and practice-relevant knowledge in the Southern African region. Furthermore, SARA aims to contribute directly and meaningfully to regional and global policy discussions around resilience and development, and elevate the southern African voice, insights and perspectives in international fora.

The main mechanism for achieving this aim is through convening a set of dynamic working groups that meet over a period of 3 years, both in person and online, to produce a collection of academic products such as peer-reviewed articles published in a special issue of an appropriate academic journal, as well as a set of strategic science-policy or science-practice engagement processes. Working groups will have the opportunity to engage in co-designed skills clinics, and co-learning between working groups will also be encouraged and facilitated. Working groups will disseminate their learnings at a dedicated public knowledge sharing event in the final year. This model builds on the learning and successes of the first round of SARA, which ran from 2021 – 2023, focussing on food systems transformations (2021) and equitable resilience (2022-2023). The outcomes of this round are available [here](#).

The Southern African Resilience Academy was established in early 2021 and is coordinated through the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST) at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, in partnership with the Global Resilience Partnership (GRP). One of the GRP's main objectives is to strengthen Global South research and practice networks through the establishment of "South-to-South Resilience Academies". The aim of these academies is to support resilience- and development-related knowledge production and exchange across regions in the Global South, and facilitate knowledge transfer from the Global South to the Global North. SARA is the southern African node of the South-to-South Resilience Academies.



CALL FOR WORKING GROUPS

SARA invites proposals for collaborative working groups to pursue inter- or transdisciplinary research and engagement that synthesizes understanding under the guiding theme of:

TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS to resilient + sustainable futures

This theme aims for working groups to take a pathways approach to understanding how different systems (eg. food, water, conservation systems) can be transformed to meet societal, climate and biodiversity goals. **Pathways** are sequences of actions, implemented progressively, which can be used flexibly depending upon how knowledge develops and future conditions unfold. **Transformative-orientated pathways** recognize that current values and governance systems may be inadequate to meet societal need for change, and aims to identify broad directions of change which can enable these fundamental changes in ways of doing and thinking.

Working groups are free to focus on their own topics or areas of interest within this broader theme. Possible subthemes under this broader theme could include (but are not limited to):

- Identifying actions to facilitate transformative pathways in food, water, marine, agricultural, urban etc. systems
- Equitable pathways/ how to ensure socially just and inclusive transformations
- Incorporating complex systems thinking into pathway planning
- Normative transformations: transformations to what? How do we decide on what transformations need to occur to achieve resilience?
- Understanding how to better integrate climate and biodiversity actions, for more holistic transformations
- The role of monitoring and evaluation in transformative pathways
- Intersections between climate, disaster risk and gender

This call targets applications from diverse working groups that combine different skills sets, thematic expertise and institutional representation. The aim of the call is to leverage and synthesise existing insights, findings, frameworks and perspectives from on-going work in the region, and facilitate learning and reflection amongst participants that can impact resilience and development policy and practice. Working groups should not aim to develop new projects that require fieldwork or extensive data collection, unless this work is embedded with working group member's roles outside of SARA, and is complementary and can be co-financed. While southern Africa is the principal region of interest, we also welcome any working groups that would propose synthesis work that draws insights from other regions of Africa and from other Global South regions.

SARA working groups will be supported to produce two types of outputs. Both sets of outputs will be developed from the outset of the process in 2025, to ensure close integration between components that can leverage off one another.

- An academic journal article, to be published by the end of the SARA process in 2027. Papers may be collated into a special issue for working groups that are interested to do so. This will provide a focus for the working group activities, and provides an opportunity to synthesize insights and experiences around a chosen subtheme. However, we recognise that an academic article may not always be the most appropriate mode of influence, and are open to proposals for other forms of peer-reviewed academic output.
- An engagement process and set of knowledge products or outputs, that aims to synthesise research findings to a wider policy and practitioner audience for uptake and impact. These will be developed in close consultation with a specialist scientific communication advisor supported by SARA, and may include training/ course development, funder dialogues, blogs, posters, social media campaigns, policy briefs, or other strategic/creative forms of knowledge mobilisation most appropriate to each working group.
- In addition to the two working group level outputs above, the SARA group as a whole will produce a knowledge product on the theme of "Transformative pathways to Resilient and Sustainable Futures" to stimulate cross-learning and synthesis across working groups.

WHY APPLY?

- SARA provides an opportunity for learning and reflection by gathering people with similar interests to synthesise their insights, knowledge, and experiences. Spaces for learning and reflection are often neglected, but can provide powerful insights that can have a range of tangible and intangible impacts on policy and practice.
- SARA provides a unique opportunity to interact and build future partnerships with a wide range of academics, practitioners and policy specialists from throughout southern Africa, with the aim to foster a strong resilience community in the region.
- A set of “skills clinics” will be provided for groups over the course of the SARA process, including training on policy engagement strategies, scientific communication skills, monitoring and evaluation of individual groups, ethics of care, facilitation and group work skills, etc. Participants with specialist skills will also be welcome to provide skills clinics to the whole group..
- The SARA network will curate opportunities for learning and mentoring for early and mid-career members.
- SARA also provides opportunities to become embedded in other regional and international networks such as the Southern African Program on Ecosystem Change and Society ([SAPECS](#)), the [Resilience Evidence Coalition](#), and the new [Society for Social-Ecological Systems](#), as well as to engage with other GRP South-to-South Academies currently being set up in other parts of the Global South.

WORKING GROUP

COMPOSITIONS AND CRITERIA

Working groups are encouraged to meet the following criteria in terms of group composition:

- Groups must include members based in at least 2 African countries. Group members originally from other African countries but working within the same country as other group members do not meet this criteria, members need to be based in and actively working in another country. Members based and working in southern African countries would be preferred, but this does not exclude members based in other areas (including beyond Africa) from participating in working groups.
- Groups are strongly encouraged to be composed of both academics (working within universities or scientific organisations) and practitioners or policy-makers (working outside of formal academic institutions). We do however recognise that these roles may be complex and overlapping, and many individuals may work in or across organisations that span these roles. We therefore encourage each group to motivate how each group member would like to be considered, beyond their formal affiliation. If practitioners are not included as formal group members, groups are required to show strong engagement with a practice perspective.
- Groups are encouraged to include participants across early, mid- and established-career positions, so as to encourage cross-learning and mentorship.
- Groups are encouraged to consider gender and other forms of diversity.

Additional criteria for working groups:

- Each working group needs to select two co-leads who will be responsible for jointly leading the academic and engagement processes.
- We encourage working groups of around five to six people, but there should be no more than 8 total participants per group, including the working group lead(s).
- In addition, working groups may select advisory members who can be consulted on specific issues (e.g. policy). Advisory members are not expected to be part of all working group activities or attend all meetings.
- Working group leads may not be leads for more than one group. In addition, working group membership in more than one group is strongly discouraged. Applicants are however welcome to lead or be part of multiple applications, and roles can be decided once final working groups have been selected.
- All working group members should be able to attend all in-person working group meetings in South Africa (all travel and accommodation costs will be covered, except for travel from outside Africa).
- Working group proposals should result in at least one scientific paper or peer-reviewed output; as well as a strategic engagement process / set of products that are aimed at a policy and practitioner audience.
- One of the key outcomes of the SARA initiative is to create policy-relevant knowledge. Each group is therefore required to show evidence of their intended or established link to policy processes, as appropriate to each group's topic. This may include including a policy-maker (or a person actively engaged in relevant policy processes) as an active group member or in an advisory role, or by outlining a specific contribution towards a larger policy process.

SUPPORT FOR WORKING GROUPS

- Support will be provided for three in-person meetings in the greater Cape Town/Stellenbosch area, South Africa (2025, 2026, 2027). Support for working groups includes travel, lodging, and meals for participants in accordance with the CST's travel policies. Travel from outside of the African continent will generally not be supported. Support for working group members will be prioritised and advisory members are not expected to be present at meetings.
- Apart from funding the three in-person gatherings, SARA will facilitate a set of online engagements and skills clinics for co-learning and strategic discussions between working groups.
- SARA will lead the coordination of the special issue if appropriate, and cover open access publication costs for publications.
- Support will be available for the development of an engagement process, aiming to strategically influence policy and implementation opportunities, with the help of a specialist science communication advisor and design team. To see the kind of products this support can lead to, please see the outcomes of the previous SARA round [here](#).
- The amount available to each group will be determined by the final constellation of groups and their proposed engagement process and strategic knowledge mobilisation needs.
- SARA will assist in knowledge mobilisation of outputs from the working groups through the extensive communication channels of the GRP, the CST, and the Southern African Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society (SAPECS), as well as support dissemination into global policy discussions.
- SARA will also fund a Knowledge Exchange event at the end of 2027, where SARA participants will have the opportunity to share results with the wider resilience, development and sustainability community.
- SARA's support does not include working group members' salaries, per diems, fieldwork costs, or grants to other institutions. Working groups are encouraged to align their proposed working group activities with member's existing work and deliverables where possible, and see SARA as an opportunity to leverage additional expertise and funding to deliver impactful outcomes.





PROPOSAL

EVALUATION AND FORMAT

Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of representatives from the GRP, CST, as well as the Program on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS). Proposals will be ranked according to their contribution to the theme of “Transformative pathways to Resilient and Sustainable Futures”; their application of a synthesis approach that leverages and draws together existing insights and expertise in new ways; a clear link to a relevant policy agenda; the novelty, creativity and feasibility of the approach or proposed outcomes; and the extent to which the members meet the group composition criteria.

Please prepare the following information for your application, which should be completed using the online application form:

- Title of proposed working group project
- Name, titles, affiliations, and contact information for the working group lead(s)
- Project Summary (150 words)
- Keywords (up to five, different from those used in the title)
- Description of project: Concise statement of the social-ecological challenge to be addressed, how the project aims to address this challenge (data, methods, knowledge co-production approach), key outcomes, and originality (350 words)
- A description of the proposed engagement processes (e.g. format, audience, expected impact) (200 words)
- How the project plans links to a local, regional or international policy agenda or wider institutional engagement processes, and whether these links are already established or are intended (200 words).
- A description of how the working group activities will be coordinated and advanced outside of formal in-person SARA meetings (200 words)
- Information on working group members: Names, titles, countries and affiliations of proposed members, and a brief description of how their mix of backgrounds, expertise and experience contributes to the success of the proposed project. Please also state that each member has confirmed their acceptance of inclusion in the proposal.
- Names, titles, countries and affiliations of any advisory group members. Please also briefly describe their roles
- Short CV of the working group leads (two pages max for each, PDF format)



[Download Online Application Form](#)

APPLICATION + DEADLINE

Please submit your application via the online form by 31st of October 2024. Individuals are welcome to be part of multiple applications, and to submit more than one proposal as lead.

Enquiries can be submitted to the director of SARA, Dr Julia van Velden, at julivanvelden@sun.ac.za

Please mark your email with the title “SARA Transformative Pathway



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