



HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

Request For Proposals

BID DESCRIPTION: APPOINTMENT OF A SERVICE PROVIDER(S) TO COLLECT DATA FOR THE SABSSM QUALITATIVE PILOT STUDY

CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSION: 27 May 2026

1. BACKGROUND

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has led the implementation of the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, and Behaviour Survey (SABSSM) series since 2002. This survey monitors HIV prevalence, incidence, and the behavioural drivers of the epidemic in South Africa. Over time, the survey has refined its communication strategies to increase participation across diverse population groups. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in achieving high response rates among certain population groups, including residents of gated communities and affluent areas, White and Indian groups, urban residents, children, and men. These gaps limit a comprehensive understanding of the evolving HIV epidemic in the country. To address this, SABSSM will conduct a qualitative pilot study to identify barriers to community and household entry for data collection and to explore factors influencing participants' willingness to provide blood samples. The study will also examine how the different stages of the research process, i.e, community entry, household entry, interviews, and blood collection, are interconnected and how they affect overall participation.

This exploratory qualitative study will involve approximately 18 semi-structured key informant interviews and 18 focus group discussions conducted across various groups and geographical areas. Participants will be purposively sampled to ensure diversity, including Black, White, and Indian individuals from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo provinces. The sample will include residents of gated communities, individuals from affluent urban and rural areas, key community gatekeepers (such as religious and traditional leaders and civil society representatives), parents or caregivers of children aged 14 years and younger, and men.

Data collection will be guided by local community dynamics, with initial engagement facilitated through community leaders and organisations. Recruitment and study awareness will be supported through social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups and other local communication channels. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted in person or online, depending on participants' preferences. Outreach to parents and caregivers will take place through social media, clinics, and schools, with efforts made to minimise disruption to educational and healthcare activities.

Maximum duration of the study: 60 days.

2. SCOPE OF WORK

The HSRC is looking for one or more service providers to demonstrate how they will undertake the following:

2.1 Recruit and supervise

- a) Recruit qualified and experienced qualitative researchers to carry out focus group discussions (our minimum expectation is 6 and maximum of 12 participants per focus group) and key informant interviews in gated, high-income, rural and urban communities in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and Gauteng provinces.
- b) The qualitative researchers must match the race, languages and gender of the targeted study participants as follows (please refer to Table 1 below for more details on the population groups of interest and the selected provinces.)
 - Qualitative researchers from the Indian community will conduct four focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential Indian participants reside in KwaZulu-Natal province, specifically in eThekweni.
 - IsiZulu-speaking male qualitative researchers will conduct two focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential isiZulu-speaking participants reside in KwaZulu-Natal province, specifically in King Cetshwayo.
 - Qualitative researchers from the White community will conduct four focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential White participants reside in Gauteng province, specifically in the City of Johannesburg.
 - Sepedi- and Xitsonga-speaking male and female qualitative researchers will conduct two focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential male participants reside in Limpopo province, specifically in Mopani-Tzaneen and Greater Giyani (Giyani E).

Table 1: Population groups of interest, data collection approach and sampled provinces

Province	Subgroup targeted	Geographical area	Method	Administration	N	Race group	Municipalities and possible areas
KZN	Mothers / caregivers	Urban and rural	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	African	Richards Bay Gingindlovu
	Indians	Affluent – Predominantly Indian	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp / online)	2	Indian	Pinetown Durban Umhlanga
		Predominantly Indian areas, not necessarily affluent	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	Indian	Pinetown Durban Umhlanga
	Men	Urban and rural	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	African Indian	Richards Bay Gingindlovu Pinetown
GP	Mothers / caregivers	Diverse	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	1	Mixed	Sandton Randburg Johannesburg
	Men	Urban	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	1	Mixed	Sandton Randburg Johannesburg
	Whites	Gated	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	White	Sandton
		Affluent	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	White	Sandton
LIMPOPO	Men	Rural and urban	FGD	In person	2	African	Tzaneen and Giyani Aqua Park Lenyenye Giyani E
	Mothers / caregivers	Rural and Urban	FGD	In person or virtual (WhatsApp/online)	2	African	
Province	Subgroup targeted	Geographical area	Method	Administration	N		
KZN	Community, religious and traditional leaders (Councillors; CPFs, Body Corps; Civil society reps)	Indian communities	KIIs	In person OR online OR telephonic	6	Indian	Pinetown Durban Umhlanga
GP	Community, religious and traditional leaders (Councillors; CPFs, Body Corps; Civil society reps)	White communities	KIIs	In person OR online OR telephonic	6	White	Sandton
LIMPOPO	Community, religious and traditional leaders (Councillors; CPFs; Civil society reps)	Rural	KIIs	In person	6	African	Tzaneen KaHomu Nganganoyi Giyane E

2.2 Key responsibilities of qualitative researchers:

- a) **Work with the HSRC provincial coordinators to conduct community entry activities for stakeholder engagement and participant recruitment**

- d) **Fieldwork Reporting:** Submit a final fieldwork report to the HSRC within 7 days of project completion, including all relevant data, challenges encountered, and lessons learned.
- e) The demographic profile of the recruited researchers should match that of the sampled communities in terms of race, gender and language.

2.5 Safety, Conduct, and Operational Responsibilities

- a) **Safety:** Bidders should always take precautions to ensure Fieldworkers' safety. They should provide safe, roadworthy, and presentable transport, daily subsistence allowances, accommodation for overnight fieldwork, and a market-related salary. Report safety incidents or accidents to the HSRC and police immediately.
- b) **Safety guidelines:** Provide risk management guidelines to ensure staff safety and protect equipment. Ensure that field staff have ID badges, wear their branded bibs, T-shirts, and caps, and use the car magnet to identify and legitimise the study.
- c) The successful Service Provider must ensure that the **Fieldworkers do not use any substances, including drugs or alcohol**, while working on this HSRC project.
- d) **Be available on your cell phone during data collection to promptly address logistical issues.**
- e) Respond to any queries that arise regarding the completed transcripts.
- f) **Data Collection and Reporting:** Ensure that all weekly data collection plans are submitted, data collected is uploaded to the database daily in accordance with protocol, and fieldwork progress reports are submitted upon completion of each SAL.
- g) Ensure that all researchers have **completed the required contract forms** (with the Service Provider) before starting the work.
- h) **Data management:** Ensure robust data management, security and protection across all stages, from collection and capturing, transfer, storage and back up.

3. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HSRC

The HSRC will:

- a) Provide the protocol, manuals, SOPs, tools, and permission letters (including printed training and fieldwork materials). Tools include the communication toolkit (flyers, posters, maps, stakeholder letters, ethics approval letter, car magnets, T-shirts), copies of the information sheets and bibs.
- b) Participate in the training to guide the Service Provider.
- c) Support aspects of community entry, which will involve engaging stakeholders and gatekeepers.
- d) Conduct oversight visits in the field.
- e) Maintain close communication with the Service Provider throughout the fieldwork.
- f) Set up a data storage platform.

4. DELIVERABLES

The expected deliverables from the Service Provider include the following:

Table 1: Activities to be covered by the successful bidder/s

Tasks	Deliverables/Output
Recruit researchers and lead the data collection training session.	<p>The service provider must share the screening tools used to shortlist relevant candidates for the training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a list of qualitative researchers, along with their CVs, to the HSRC for review before training. <p>All qualitative researchers under the service provider's supervision must attend training.</p>
TRREE research ethics certificate	<p>The successful service provider must ensure that qualified qualitative researchers complete the TRREE research ethics module 1 and obtain a certificate before commencing the fieldwork.</p>
Data collection preparation	<p>Following the training, the service provider should role-play with the field teams to ensure that fieldworkers are familiar with the study procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They must share an overall and weekly field implementation plan outlining the areas to be visited. • They must lead community entry activities and also liaise with the HSRC communications team around implementation plans. • They must recruit eligible individuals for participation in the study. • The service provider must arrange appropriate venues and locations for data collection with prior approval from the HSRC.
Supervise all data collection as directed by HSRC	<p>Ensure that all focus group discussions and key informant interviews are scheduled and carried out within the agreed timeframes.</p>
Conduct data collection	<p>Data must be captured using the service provider's data collection tools. All focus group discussions and key informant interviews must be conducted in the language and at the location preferred by participants. Upon completion of fieldwork, all data must be submitted to the HSRC.</p>
Participant incentives	<p>Reimburse each participant the agreed fee with HSRC for their time and effort.</p>
Refreshments	<p>Offer participants refreshments in form of water or juice and biscuits.</p>

Data	Data in the form of fieldwork notes, voice recordings, verbatim transcripts, original language, translated transcripts, all properly labelled.
Provide HSRC with the full names of Fieldworkers as they appear in the ID book/card. Include photos of all Fieldworkers.	HSRC will use this information to compile a database and generate name tags for fieldworkers to wear during fieldwork activities for the duration of the project.
The HSRC will not accept any responsibility for any claim arising from injury, death, loss, or damage to property suffered by a fieldworker or their dependents in the execution of their duties under this agreement.	
It is agreed that no employer–employee relationship exists between the HSRC and the individual fieldworkers. The Service Provider appoints the fieldworkers in accordance with the minimum requirements set out herein.	
The successful Service Provider will be responsible for data collection tools, including tablets, laptops, a recorder, and transcription tools.	
The successful service provider will be issued HSRC-branded bibs and t-shirts, which must be cleaned and returned in good condition. The final payment will be made only after the HSRC has received all required reports, data, and branded materials (e.g., bibs and t-shirts).	
<p>NO PAYMENT:</p> <p>Should any fraud involving data be detected, e.g., fabricated focus group discussions or key informant interviews, payment will be withheld.</p>	
The final payment to the supplier will be made only once the quality of the work has been verified and accepted by the HSRC Project team.	

5. Mandatory requirements

- 1) A company profile that includes your company's history, vision, mission, location, infrastructure and staff profiles with a minimum of 5 years of experience.
- 2) The service provider must have access to a pool of experienced qualitative researchers and share a list of CVs of these researchers who meet the study recruitment strategy in terms of race, language and gender as per the below specification in line with the province(s) the service provider will be working in:

- Qualitative researchers from the Indian community will conduct four focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential Indian participants reside in KwaZulu-Natal province, specifically in eThekweni.
 - IsiZulu-speaking male qualitative researchers will conduct two focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential isiZulu-speaking participants reside in KwaZulu-Natal province, specifically in King Cetshwayo.
 - Qualitative researchers from the White community will conduct four focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential White participants reside in Gauteng province, specifically in the City of Johannesburg.
 - Sepedi- and Xitsonga-speaking male and female qualitative researchers will conduct two focus group discussions and six key informant interviews in communities where potential male participants reside in Limpopo province, specifically in Mopani-Tzaneen and Greater Giyani (Giyani E).
- 3) The service provider must have a proven track record (reports) demonstrated by three examples of having conducted similar work within ANY of these communities/provinces relevant to this study (affluent urban, including gated communities, and rural areas, predominantly Indian and White communities).
 - 4) A detailed project execution plan, including timelines and a comprehensive budget, must be submitted.
 - 5) The service provider must also provide three (3) contactable references regarding similar work completed within ten years.

6. TIMELINES

The successful service provider is expected to complete the assignment within 60 days from the date on which the Service Level Agreement is signed by both parties.

Requisition advertised to potential service providers:

- a) **Non Compulsory briefing session will be on: online via Teams on 21 May 2026 @ 10:00am.**

[Non-Compulsory Briefing Session :APPOINTMENT OF A SERVICE PROVIDER\(S\) TO COLLECT DATA FOR THE SABSSM QUALITATIVE PILOT STUDY | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)

<https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/347578646230241?p=SgyrlgczO80XYDWImz>

b) Closing date of the proposal: 27 May 2026 Close Of Business

7. CONTACT PERSON

Dr Tebogo Gumede-Mazwai: tgumede@hsrc.ac.za

8. Evaluation criteria

The following criteria will be applied: 80/20 Preference Point System (80: Price; 20: Specific Goals)

Minimum threshold: 75

Criterion	Weight
<p>1. Experience</p> <p>Provided a company profile document which details experience in qualitative research with a minimum of 5 years (15):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 years and above (11-15 points)• 6-8 years (6 -10 points)• 5 years (1- 5 points)	15
<p>2. References</p> <p>Provided 3 or more contactable references where similar work was completed within ten years. Submit letters from contactable references; the format for these letters must be on a company letterhead, dated, and signed. (15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submitted 3 or more reference letters for similar work completed within ten years - (11-15 points)• Submitted 2 reference letters for similar work completed within ten years - (6-10 points)• Submitted 1 reference letter for similar work completed within ten years - (1-5 points)• Not provided- (0 points)	15
<p>3. Project Execution Plan</p> <p>Provided the appropriate project execution plan demonstrating the organisation's ability and plans to successfully complete the project within a period of 60 days (30)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed timeline, allocation of roles, risk management plan and adherence to 60-day deadline-Excellent (21-30 points)	30

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline and roles provided, but limited risk planning or vague deadlines - Good (6-20 points) • General description without a clear timeline or role allocation and vague - Fair (1-5 points) • Not provided- Poor (0 points) 	
<p>4. Experience of Qualitative Researchers Provided a list of experienced qualitative researchers meeting the recruitment profile in terms of location, race, language and gender (25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers experienced in qualitative research meet the recruitment profile with 11 years or more years of working experience in conducting the qualitative study (location, race, gender and language)- Excellent (21-25 points) • Researchers experienced in qualitative research meet the recruitment profile with a minimum of 7 to 10 years of experience in conducting the qualitative study (location, race, gender and language)- Good (11-20 points) • Researchers experienced in qualitative research meet the recruitment profile with a minimum of 5 to 6 years of experience in conducting the qualitative study (location, race, gender and language)- Fair (1-10 points) • Researchers experienced in qualitative research meet the recruitment profile – with minimum of less than five years or no working experience conducting the qualitative study (location, race, gender and language)- Poor (0 points) 	25
<p>5. Data Management Plan Provided a detailed data management plan describing the process related to data capturing, storage, protection, and backup procedures (15)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive data management plan with relevant equipment and security details (laptops and recorders)- Good (6 -15 points) • Data management submitted with limited or missing information Fair (1- 5 points) • No data management plan- Poor (0) 	15
Total	100

SCM Documents to be submitted

- Proposal
- Completed & Signed SBD4 & SBD 6.1
- Valid BBBEE certificate Affidavit
- CSD Report
- Tax certificate