

African Energy Futures  
3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025

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Guidance on responding to  
the AEF call for proposals to  
host an energy research hub

## African Energy Futures Summary

Africa's energy future must be planned by Africans, for Africans.

African Energy Futures (AEF) will support the creation of a community of research hubs that empower African experts to shape energy policy and investment decisions in their countries and across the continent. These hubs will deepen in-country understanding of energy transition pathways and impact energy planning with a focus on development outcomes.



Why do we want to do this?

Effective energy planning is a multi-year, iterative and inclusive process. It requires policymakers and researchers working together to understand nuance and explore scenarios. Energy planning is as much a capacity building process as it is a modelling and research process. Yet, today African policymakers and investors make decisions relying on donor-funded single studies delivered by international consultants with a paucity of data. 60% of research on African energy systems involves no African authors. No wonder Africa suffers amongst the lowest energy investment rates when compared to the rest of the world.

We believe this demands a fundamental shift in Africa's energy research infrastructure. Researchers and think-tanks need long-term funding that allows institutions to invest in people and modelling infrastructure. Policymakers need long-term relationships with local researchers who understand the country's political, social, economic, and environmental constraints and opportunities - teams they can trust.



African Energy Futures' approach

AEF will channel international philanthropy and donor support into three-to-five-year funding support for "hubs" of research institutions, think-tanks and policymakers focussed on energy decision making in a particular country (or region, or topic). This will allow the hubs to invest in academic staff and modelling infrastructure and build the overall human capability base.

The AEF team will provide these hubs with technical support to develop good future proposals, develop inclusive processes, connect them to partner-driven training, further resources, and help them tell compelling stories that will attract policymaker and industry interest. Alongside technical support, AEF will provide coordination support to this growing community, strengthening the African voice through connecting them to each other, international partners, and other support.

Over time we will establish 20 such hubs who will anchor an African network focussed on African solutions, and who will train over 400 African energy analysts. Better capacity will result in better planning and therefore better policy and investment environments.

# Requirements at a glance

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## Who can apply?

- Africa-based public and private universities, research institutes, or non-profit think tanks.
- Consortia are welcome, but **one African institution must act as the lead** and contracting party.
- The lead institution must be able to manage multi-year grants and receive foreign payments.

## What we fund

- Establishment or strengthening of an **energy research hub** that:
  - Produces **applied research** and modelling on power and energy systems, fuels, industry and the wider economy.
  - Works closely with **national planning or policy partners** (e.g. energy ministry, planning commission, regulator, utility, central bank).
  - Coordinates a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary **community of practice**.
  - **Trains the next generation** of energy modellers
- Eligible activities include staff time, fellowships and studentships, modelling and data work, policy dialogues and workshops, training, limited equipment and software, and reasonable overheads.

## Grant size and duration

- In this 3<sup>rd</sup> December call, AEF will award a grant to **one hub** with a total budget of no more than **US\$ 1 million** to be spent over 3 to 5 years.

## Application process

- **At this phase our proposal process we are asking for concept notes with a maximum length of 5 pages** (including all appendices but excluding letters of support from host institutions and potential partners).
- **Concept notes are due by the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026, to be submitted on the AEF website.**
- **Up to 10 concepts will be asked to submit proposals and will receive further guidance.**

## Key expectations for all hubs

- Clear, country-relevant **research and modelling agenda** on energy and the economy.
- Demonstrated and credible plan for **sustaining the hub over time**.
- Plans to **train people, share results, data and tools** in ways that support wider use in the country and region.

## Contact

- All questions must be submitted by email to [info@africanenergyfutures.org](mailto:info@africanenergyfutures.org)

# Call for proposal guidance - introduction

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African Energy Futures (AEF) welcomes your interest in hosting an AEF Energy Research Hub. This is an invitation to join us in leading the building of an African wide community of practice focussed on African led research to solve African challenges. If Africa is to chart and implement its own development future, we must take the time and effort to build capacity across the continent. Bidders must therefore have the intention of using the grant support provided by AEF to build a long-term sustainable institution engaged in collaborative research and training that will continue post-AEF funding. This is not project specific funding but support intended to strengthen or establish institutions focused on energy modelling and planning in Africa.

This document, read together with the eligibility criteria and information note on AEF, should provide you with sufficient guidance to submit an impactful concept note. We will describe, the two-stage proposal process and timelines, what we expect of a concept note including our delivery areas, budget expectations, and research priorities. An important part of the process will be contextualising your plan in the local socio-economic and political economy and explaining why your planned intervention

will impact the capacity of your country. Of importance will be the suitability of your institution to host such a hub, as well as the experience of your key staff. Finally, a specific plan will be required for how you might sustain your institution over time, and what institutional and political support you might have.

Please ensure you read the separate eligibility criteria before submitting a concept note. Concept notes from non-eligible institutions will not be entertained.

We anticipate concept notes and proposals from individual institutions or consortia of institutions. We request proposals be led by one organisation who will be reasonable for management of the hub, will act as the contracting party, and who will be accountable for deliverables. Consortia, however, especially where they combine needed skills across institutions, are welcomed.

If you have any questions about this guidance or questions about the concept note submission process that we have not addressed please submit your questions to [info@africanenergyfutures.org](mailto:info@africanenergyfutures.org).

## Our two-stage process – concept then proposal

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The AEF energy research hub call for proposals is divided into two phases. In this first phase you will be invited to submit concept notes of 5 pages or less. Please do not exceed 5 pages. While this will not disqualify you from the second phase it will reduce your chances of success. Each concept note will be reviewed by the AEF team. Our analysis will be moderated by an external expert or experts.

The concept note analysis will be summarised and presented to an external advisory committee that will make recommendations on the best concept notes to be taken forward to phase two.

In phase 2, up to ten of the best concept notes will be directly invited to submit full proposals and will be provided with further guidance on our expectations for proposals. If you do not hear from us please assume that your concept note was not successful for this round. This call for proposals is for **fully funded hubs**.

The concept notes submitted will inform where there is further need for and potential for informal, candidate, and smaller hubs, as well as fully funded hubs for further rounds. Submitted concept notes will therefore influence the AEF strategy and approach to the donor and partner community for future support. By submitting a concept note, you give us permission to use your concept note content in discussions with donors and other partners.

Each of the submitted proposals will be evaluated by the AEF team and an independent expert or experts and the analysis presented to an external review panel that will make recommendations on the most promising potential hub host.

The winning bidder will be subject to a due diligence process following which contracting will be completed. Only once contracting is completed will the winning bidder be announced.

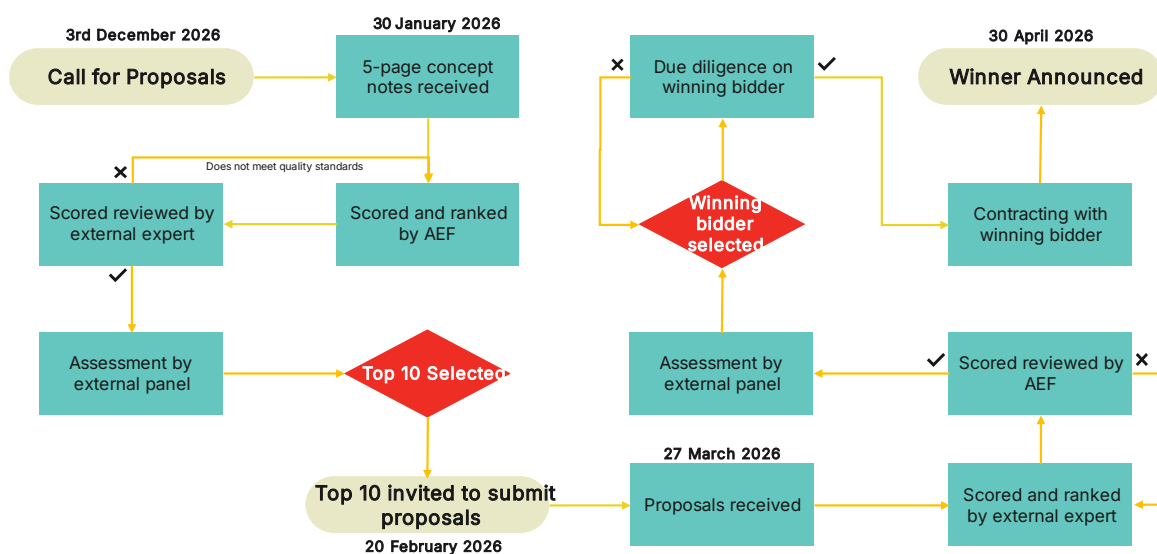
This process is described in figure 1 below. Key timelines are:

- Concept notes are due by midnight on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026
- The best concept notes will be invited to submit full proposals on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2026
- Proposals are due 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026
- The winning bidder will be announced on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026

AEF reserve the right to adjust timelines based on the quantity and quality of concept notes received. We will notify you of any changes using the email address you submit with the concept note.

Figure 1: African Energy Futures 2-step call for proposal process

A two-step process kicking off with a concept note phase followed by the top bidders (up to 10) being invited to submit full proposals



# Work area expectations – research, teaching, and a community of practice

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Energy research hubs are asked to fulfil three broad functions: conduct research, train the next generation, and build a community of practice drawing on a wide range of modelling and research approaches intended on answering specific policy questions.

Within each function there is a wide range of flexibility according to your country needs. However, the basis of the research and teaching needs to be focussed on energy (supply side and/or demand side) with an emphasis on modelling.

In your proposal you would need to describe your intentions across each function drawing guidance from the below.

## Research

You will need to produce over time grey literature and/or peer reviewed literature on your research area. In your concept note you must describe your research focus area and your research plan for producing outputs. We would expect you to locate your research focus and plan in the local socio-economic and political economy context and describe how your research will impact on the policy and investment environment.

## Teaching

Please describe your plan to enhance teaching of energy modelling in your (and potentially other) focus areas. This could be through enhancing existing programmes or introducing new teaching programmes. Please detail your plans for any of undergraduate and Honours and Master's programmes. PhD and Post-Doc programmes are important. You are not

required to teach at every level but Masters and PhD programmes are desirable.

Furthermore, plans to provide training to private sector and public sector participants are welcomed. Teaching may be broadened outside your institution and country.

## Focus areas

Topics for teaching and research are not limited to, but could include one or more of the following areas:

- Capacity modelling
- Transitions in energy
- Production cost modelling
- Demand-side modelling or productive uses of energy
- Geo-spatial modelling
- Static grid modelling
- Dynamic grid modelling
- Energy efficiency
- Market design and pricing
- Energy access and affordability
- Clean cooking
- Data discovery, provision, and processing
- The role of AI in modelling and in data discovery

The research focus areas must be positioned in the context of your country context and you may consider focus areas not listed.

## Community or practice

Policymakers and investors are more receptive to research outputs if they have been involved in the research process. Furthermore, policymakers and investors operate in complex environments where they must balance a range of competing and sometimes contradictory criteria. Providing convincing development arguments to decision making stakeholders therefore may require multiple models and insights that are likely to extend beyond the capability of one institution.

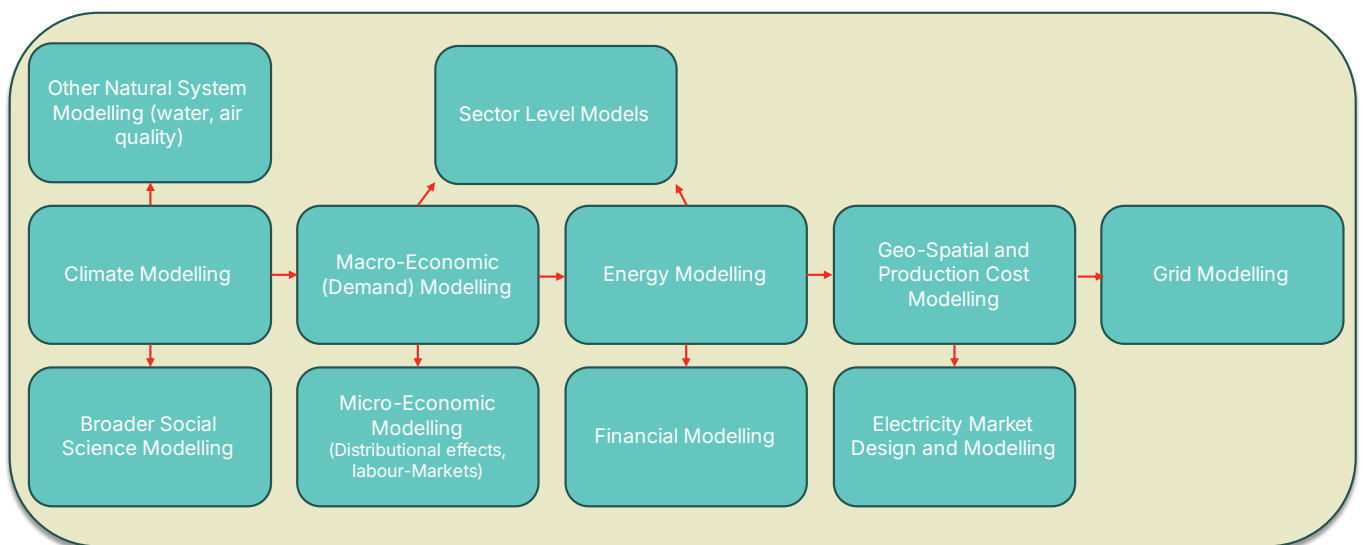
In building the capacity for energy modelling and planning in your country these are

therefore two important functions of an energy research hub – inclusive research processes and building a community of practice. An illustration of the breadth of such a community is provided in figure 2.

In your proposal you should detail how you intend on building a community of practice as well as how you would run inclusive research processes on core issues of energy planning in your country.

Figure 2: A sample community of practice

A broad range of modelling tools and institutions that work together are required to support policy decisions



Based on a community of practice established by the Presidential Climate Commission of South Africa

# General guidance

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## Budget

We are offering potential hubs US\$ 1 million in funding over 3 to 5 years. In this round we will fund one hub. Hubs should begin operations as early as possible after April 2026.

You are not required to submit a detailed budget at this concept note stage. However, please provide an indicative budget indicating costs split across the eligible cost categories of staff, infrastructure, community coordination and stakeholder engagement events, travel, the purchase of models and data, data processes, teaching costs, and any bursaries or student reimbursement.

Overhead from a host institution must be capped at 12%. Value for money will be an important selection consideration.

## Geographic and topic focus

It is important that a hub is responsive to its socio-economic and political context. It is therefore expected that most hub concept notes will focus on a single country. You may however focus on more than one country or region. However, the onus will then be on you to demonstrate that you have the necessary understanding of the region, and necessary reach to coordinate a community of practice and run inclusive research processes over a broader region.

Likewise, you may submit a hub proposal for a specific research topic that is not linked to geography. For example, on productive uses of energy or energy efficiency. Once again, the onus will be on you to demonstrate your convening reach and political economy understanding and impact.

Furthermore, the sustainability of these more complex institutional structures must be demonstrated within the offered grant amount.

## Language policy

The primary language of AEF is English, and all correspondence will be in English. In future proposal rounds we plan to allow correspondence and concept notes in French, Portuguese, and Arabic.

## Staffing

Your concept note must disclose a core team that can lead the necessary quality of research, meet your training objectives, and convene multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary processes. Provide a high-level description of your planned team, as well as brief profiles for your senior team, especially your project leader.

## Partnership needs

Please identify in your proposal where you may have gaps in building a full hub capacity. Please also indicate where you think AEF can provide additional support through areas such as, but not limited to, political process design, international partner support, and research partner support.

## Multiple proposals

Individual people or institutions are allowed to participate in more than one consortium, and a single institution may submit multiple proposals (sufficiently differentiated, perhaps with different focus areas and/or partners).

## Institutional support

If you are submitting as a unit within a larger host institution, please provide a letter of support from your host institution. This will not count as one of your 5 pages but must be submitted as part of a single document.

## Demand signals

Given our desired impact on policymakers, investment and the enabling environment, letters of support from counterparts are welcomed, although not compulsory. They will not be counted as part of your 5-page limit but a single document must be submitted.

## Data challenges

Please indicate where you anticipate challenges with obtaining appropriately accurate and granular data. Please indicate partners you may need to work with (for example state statistics entities) in order to obtain this data and how you generally plan to plug data gaps. This may form part of your country or regions long-term capacity needs.

Please also indicate your data transparency and openness intentions. AEF will favour efforts to make data publicly available.

## Open-source modelling

AEF will favour open-source modelling that is made available to a wider research community. Please describe how you will document your model and how you will distribute it to others.

If you plan on building on existing open-source models for your focus area please describe this model and your rights to use it.

## Open access publications

Ideally peer reviewed publications will be published in open access journals.

## Ethics and conflict of interest

Please disclose any conflicts of interest you may have and any ethical considerations arising from your research, teaching, and convening plans. If you anticipate these risks, disclose relevant ethics and conflict of interest process in place already, or your plans to establish them.

## Governance

It should be clear how your institution will be governed in relation to this grant. Furthermore, when submitting on behalf of a consortium describe how the partnerships will be governed and conflicts resolved.

## Minimum concept note expectations

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In summary, each concept note, within the allocated 5 pages, should contain the following sections:

1. Socio-economic and political context. Describe the context that frames your concept and how your intervention will be both relevant and impactful. This section should be concluded with a clear problem statement and demand signal.
2. Your research focus. Leading on from your description of the context describe your research and teaching focus and how it will create long term capacity in your geographic or topic area.
3. How you intend to deliver on the 3 functions of research, teaching, and community of practice convening.
4. Your plans for establishing and managing a community of practice and your thinking on running inclusive research processes.
5. Your partnership strategy and potential support needs.
6. Your staffing plan, including your senior staff and leader.
7. Data challenges and resolution.
8. Your high-level budget.
9. What role your institution will play in managing the network of AEF Energy Research Hubs
10. How can we contact you?

Please provide indications of your institutional and political support as part of your submission document. However, these will not be counted toward your 5 pages.

## Enquiries

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If you have any questions about the AEF grant process or this call for proposals that are not addressed in our published guidance, please contact [info@africanenergyfutures.org](mailto:info@africanenergyfutures.org). Please note that we do not have the capacity to review concept notes and provide comments on the likelihood of receiving funding separately to the review process described in this document.

## How to apply

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Concept notes submitted in response to this call for proposals must be submitted on our website. We ask you to please register when accessing these documents and then again when you submit a concept note. This allows us to track interest across the various stages of our process.

Concept notes must be submitted as a pdf in font size 11.

By submitting a proposal you give us permission to use large language models as part of a comprehensive analysis process.



# How to get involved in AEF

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There are several ways to engage with the AEF community



## Research Institutions

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**Register your intent to host a hub on our website.**

Prospective hosts must be interested in leading multi-disciplinary projects with inclusive research practices. AEF will support hub hosts to lead long-term modelling capability in their countries.

Hubs will be expected to help develop an African wide community of researchers engaged in energy planning and development.



## Partner Programmes

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**Start a discussion to help AEF scale its support.**

If you think there is an opportunity to partner with us, we would love to hear from you.

If you are a university or research institution with experience in energy or economic modelling and would like to act as a mentor or collaborator with an African hub, please let us know.



## Policymakers

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**Support a local hub in your country.**

If you are involved with or leading energy planning processes in your country and would like robust, contextually aware modelling support, please contact us.



## Donors

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**Collaborate with AEF on energy modelling and capacity building.**

If you are a donor or philanthropist and would like to support the AEF, support could be through:

- Supporting policy specific research projects in hubs.
- Supporting one or more small or large hubs.

## Contact Us

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If you have any questions, would like to enquire about establishing a hub, or would like more information, please reach out to [info@africanenergyfutures.org](mailto:info@africanenergyfutures.org). You can also follow us on social media or get more information on our website: [www.africanenergyfutures.org](http://www.africanenergyfutures.org).

Blue Sky: [@AEFcomms.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/aeffcomms.bsky.social)

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LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/african-energy-futures>