The 12ᵗʰ AfricaLics Ph.D. Academy on Innovation and Competence Building Systems will be held in Johannesburg, hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the AfricaLics Research Capacity Strengthening Project.

02 November – 12 November 2026

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The AfricaLics network is an academic research and capacity-strengthening network that focuses on how innovation (the process through which new or improved products, processes, organisational forms, ways of working, and acting are introduced into new environments) occurs and the relationship this has with economic and social development in African countries. Such research is becoming known in the network as 'innovation and development studies' because it is at the intersection of innovation studies and development studies.

The 12ᵗʰ AfricaLics PhD Academy offers PhD students enrolled at African universities who work in the field of innovation and development studies the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of this burgeoning field, meet leading academics in the field, and receive feedback on their PhD studies.

The 12ᵗʰ AfricaLics PhD Academy will be held as an in-person event at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) campus in Johannesburg, South Africa. It will be held alongside the 7ᵗʰ AfricaLics Research Conference (https://africalicssouthafrica.witsevents.co.za/) scheduled for 10 – 12 November 2026.

This is a call for students enrolled in a PhD at an African university who work in the field of innovation and development studies to apply to participate in this residential PhD Academy event.

Innovation and development studies

The AfricaLics network was founded in 2012 due to a growing recognition of the need for more support for academic 'research *on* innovation' that had relevance to the contextual environments of African countries. This burgeoning body of work by African scholars is essential to ensure 'research *in* innovation' (i.e., research and development of specific

inventions that can help solve practical problems), where most innovation policy and funding attention is focused, can be effectively supported. The concept of 'research on innovation' focuses on innovation processes, what fosters innovation and on what may help new solutions get accepted and adopted. It is particularly interested in understanding the impact of innovation on the social and economic development of African countries. It considers these issues at the level of firms, networks, and collaborations as well as at the national, continental, and global levels. As such the work of scholars in the AfricaLics network is multidisciplinary being at the intersection of the established academic fields of innovation studies and development studies.

This multidisciplinary field includes researchers from a range of disciplines often studying innovation studies, the economics of innovation, innovation management, technology management, science and technology studies. However, the network also includes those from other more disciplinary fields such as engineering, economics and political science.

Who is eligible to apply?

PhD students working in innovation and development studies and who are principally interested in how innovation relates to economic and social development in Africa are the main target group for the PhD Academy.

The Academy will host approximately 20-25 students from Africa and a handful of students from other parts of the world.

Specifically, PhD students who wish to participate will need to fulfil the following requirements:

- work explicitly on issues related to policy-oriented analysis of science, technology and innovation

- be able to present an original paper reflecting his/her research and/or thesis work that fits within the thematic areas of the AfricaLics network

- preferably be at least at the beginning of his/her second year at the time of the academy (a small number of first-year PhD students may be accepted)

If you are in doubt as to whether you can apply, please contact us using the email address at the bottom of the call.

We will have a limited number of places available to master's students studying in South Africa. These selected students will be granted observer status i.e. can attend but will not present their work.

Master degree students who wish to participate will need to fulfil the following requirements:

- be a registered Masters student in a South African university on a degree programme in the area of economics, business or management studies, sociology or development studies or similar

- have a Masters project that will focus on an aspect of innovation studies (i.e. innovation management or innovation systems)

To improve diversity in the emerging academic community on innovation and development studies research in Africa, we encourage female scholars and those from low-income countries to apply.

Design of the Academy

The Academy will invite frontier researchers in innovation and development from around the world to deliver lectures and mentor students. The Academy also provides opportunities for PhD students to share their work and learn new skills. As such, the Academy is made up of the following activities:

- Lectures by senior researchers on areas ranging from research methodologies to the latest theories and empirical research in the fields of innovation, innovation management and science policy.

- Presentations by doctoral students of their work with feedback from the senior scholars facilitating at the event.

- Sessions focused on enabling interaction between students, practitioners and policy makers on innovation and development issues

- Study visits to innovation hubs, innovative businesses and/or similar organisations

- Sessions that focus on key skills that students need to complete their PhD and become successful academic researchers such as publishing or project management skills

- A practical project that helps students think through how to ensure their PhD project is addressing developmental issues and how to ensure results will be articulated to relevant policy and practitioner stakeholders.

- A two-day supervision workshop focusing on topics such as what good supervision looks like, the student-supervisor relationship and key tools for the PhD journey (planning, good work habits and how to deal with feedback).

The Academy's language of instruction will be English. We will not be able to provide translation services. A good level of spoken and written English will be required by students accepted into this Academy.

An overview of the likely programme for the Academy is provided in Appendix 1.

How to apply

PhD students who apply must submit an extended abstract of their PhD thesis, not exceeding five (5) pages.

Master's students who apply must submit an extended abstract of their Master's project, not exceeding two (2) pages.

The abstract must be submitted _together with_ a covering letter, the applicant's CV, and a recommendation letter from the applicant's principal PhD/ Master's supervisor or a senior scholar who is familiar with the applicant's work.

These documents should be sent to the AfricaLics Secretariat (phd-academy@africalics.org) on or before 23:00 hours East Africa time on Monday, 15th April 2026.

Format of abstracts

Abstracts should be typed double-spaced in English with font size 12. The abstract must include the following sections:

1. Background and literature review

2. The research objectives or research questions

3. Methodology including the data collection and analysis techniques to be used,

4. Expected contribution to academia and policy discussions.

5. References

Please also make it clear in your application if you are preparing a thesis by publication or manuscript/ monograph thesis.

Selection

All extended abstracts will be reviewed by at least two senior scholars from a review panel comprising members of the AfricaLics Scientific Board, the AfricaLics Secretariat, the AfricaLics RCS team, and the host University.

Selection will be made based on the academic quality of extended abstracts as well as on the basis of criteria aimed at promoting diversity (by location, gender, etc.). Selection criteria for AfricaLics events are published on the AfricaLics website: http://www.africalics.org/selection-criteria/

Successful applicants will be notified by 15th May 2026 of their acceptance to the Academy.

Sponsorship and travel support

Successfully selected participants will be expected to arrive on Sunday 01 November 2026 and leave on the night of Thursday 12 November 2026. The airport to arrive and depart from is OR Tambo International Airport. Airport shuttle arrangements will be made by the organisers.

The AfricaLics Research Capacity Strengthening (RCS) project will cover the cost of 11 nights of accommodation, on a dinner, bed and breakfast basis, during the Academy for accepted PhD students. No daily subsistence allowance or stipend is provided but lunch and 2 refreshment breaks will be provided during the academy. Students should be expected to bring sufficient funds with them to cover the cost of any sightseeing and lunch on Sunday, 08 November.

The AfricaLics RCS project also has funding to cover the costs of economy-class return airfares for those attending who are registered at an African university based in a country classified by the OECD as 'least developed', 'low income' or 'low middle income', and who will be attending from outside South Africa.

If you are interested in applying for this travel support, please indicate as such in your cover letter and ensure that your cover letter and the support letter from your supervisor indicate how you have tried to find alternative sources of funding for your trip In addition, such applicants must indicate that they have (a) tried to source funding from elsewhere and (b) have been unable to source alternative funding. Only those from African countries classified by OECD as least developed, low or low-middle-income can apply for this travel support. These applicants will be asked to complete a travel support request form. Details of this process will be made available once an applicant has received confirmation of their acceptance at the academy. Acceptance at the academy does not automatically guarantee financial support to cover the cost of your air ticket. If financial support is given to cover the cost of an air ticket, the amount of support awarded may not cover the whole cost of the air ticket. No support is provided for ancillary costs associated with your travel e.g. visa costs, other transport costs.

All accepted applicants will be responsible for their own visa and travel insurance arrangements, including the cost of these.

Confirmation of attendance and final paper upload

All successful applicants are expected to confirm their participation by 23:00 hours East African Time on Tuesday, 1st September 2026; otherwise, their place will be offered to another applicant.

All selected participants who confirm attendance will also be expected to upload a final FULL paper (details of this will be given in your acceptance letter) by 23:00 hours East African time on Monday, 5th October 2026. The full paper should be a full project proposal (for Master's students) or a chapter of, or paper from, your thesis that you would like to present and get feedback on during the Academy (for PhD students).

Organisation and support

The 12th AfricaLics Ph.D. Academy is organised by Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa with support from the AfricaLics RCS project hosted at the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), Kenya. The event is financially supported by Wits University, the AfricaLics network, and Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency).

The local organising committee at Wits University is led by: Prof. Geci Karuri-Sabina. Day-to-day organisation of the Academy at Wits University is the responsibility of Dr Amy Matua. Organisation of the Academy at the AfricaLics RCS project is being managed by Prof. Rebecca Hanlin.

Contacts

For any queries or questions about the academy contact: rebeccah@uj.ac.za

For general queries about Wits University: amy.mutua@wits.ac.za

For general queries about the AfricaLics RCS project: RCS@africalics.org

For general queries about AfricaLics: secretariat@africalics.org

OVERVIEW PROGRAMME

PhD students arrive on Sunday, 01 November 2026. Any accommodation arrangements before Sunday, 01 November, or on Thursday, 12 November, or after this date, will be the responsibility of the individual participant.

WEEK 1: 02 NOVEMEBER – 08 NOVEMBER

Time (SAST)	Monday 02 November	Tuesday 03 November	Wednesday 04 November	Thursday 05 November	Friday 06 November	Saturday 07 November	Sunday 08 November
08.30 – 09:00	Registration	Registration	Registration	Registration	Registration	Free	Registration
09:00 – 10:30	Official Opening Introduction to Academy	Theory Lecture 2 Details TBC	3-minute pitch by Master's students	Methods session 2 Details TBC	Supervision workshop	Supervision workshop	Free day
Break							
11:00 – 12:30	Theory Lecture 1 Intro to I&D	Methods session 1a Details TBC	Group work Visit to project case study locations	Theory Lecture 3 Details TBC	Supervision workshop	Supervision workshop	Free day
Lunch							
13:30 – 15:00	Policy Roundtable	Methods session 1b Details TBC	Group work Work on projects	Methods session 3 Details TBC	Supervision workshop	Supervision workshop	Free day
Break							
15:30 – 17.00	Group work Intro to project work	How to... session 1 Write a policy brief	Group work Work on projects	Group work Work on projects	Supervision workshop	Supervision workshop	Free day
Evening	Welcome event	Free	Free	Drop-in Clinic: Publications	Free	Free	Free

Time (SAST)	Monday 09 November	Tuesday 10 November	Wednesday 11 November	Thursday 12 November
08.30 – 09:00	Registration			
09:00 – 10:30	Group work Presentation of projects			
Break				
11:00 – 12:30	Group work Feedback and evaluation			
Lunch				
13:30 – 15:00	Lecture Closing lecture			
Break				
15:30 – 17.00	Free time			
Evening				Airport departures

Follow the conference programme with dedicated paper parallel sessions for student paper presentations.