

# Request for Proposals (RFP)

<b>Title</b>	Independent Impact Evaluation Firm/Institution		
<b>Open to</b>	Accredited research institutions, universities, evaluation firms, and research consortia with demonstrated experience in impact evaluation in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and mental health. International applicants are eligible, provided they demonstrate strong contextual expertise in South Africa or partner with a South Africa-based institution.		
<b>RFP Ref #</b>	IRD-G/RFP/2602-01	<b>Contact details (RFP-related queries)</b>	<a href="mailto:procurement@ird.global">procurement@ird.global</a>
<b>Issuance Date</b>	February 24, 2026	<b>Submission Deadline</b>	March 17, 2026

## 1. RFP Overview

- Geographic Focus:
  - South Africa
- Target Population:
  - Children under five (0–59 months), caregivers, ECD practitioners, and community systems
- Engagement Structure:
  - Phase 1:
    - Evaluation Design & Inception
    - April 2026 – June 2026
  - Phase 2:
    - Longitudinal Evaluation Implementation
    - July 2026 – April 2029 (Subject to performance, funding availability, and separate contracting)
- Budget Information (Phase 1 Only):
  - The anticipated budget range for Phase 1 is approximately USD 25,000–30,000.
  - Applicants should submit a detailed financial proposal aligned with this range. The Phase 2 implementation budget should be co-developed and submitted as a deliverable. The Phase 2 budget will be negotiated separately and may not be guaranteed under this RFP.

## 2. Background and Context

IRD Global invites proposals from qualified research and academic organizations to undertake the design of an independent impact evaluation of the *Kuyakhanya* program, an integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiative being implemented in rural South Africa. *Kuyakhanya* focuses on strengthening and enriching ecosystems of care for young children by working with caregivers, ECD practitioners, and community members.

Aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework, the program emphasizes opportunities for early learning through improving access to and quality of early learning programs and nutrition, improving caregiver and ECD practitioner capacity to care through training and mental health services, and right to safe spaces through a hub-and-spoke model. The program aims to support the objectives and priorities of South Africa's National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy and ECD 2030 Strategy, particularly in relation to equitable access, quality improvement, practitioner support, and intersectoral coordination in underserved rural contexts.

*Kuyakhanya* responds to persistent inequities in access to quality ECD in rural settings, where fragmented services, under-resourced ECD centres, and structural barriers constrain children's developmental outcomes. The program adopts a community-embedded, strengths-based approach that recognizes caregivers, practitioners, and local stakeholders as central agents within nurturing care systems. Presently, the program is being implemented across five districts in rural KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and aims to expand to up to three more provinces in the coming years.

IRD Global seeks an evaluation partner that can rigorously assess program contributions to child, caregiver, practitioner, and community outcomes while remaining methodologically appropriate, ethical, and feasible within real-world implementation constraints. The evaluation partner is expected to work closely with IRD Global and the programme consortium to design an evaluation framework and its associated tools, and, thereafter, deploy this independent evaluation.

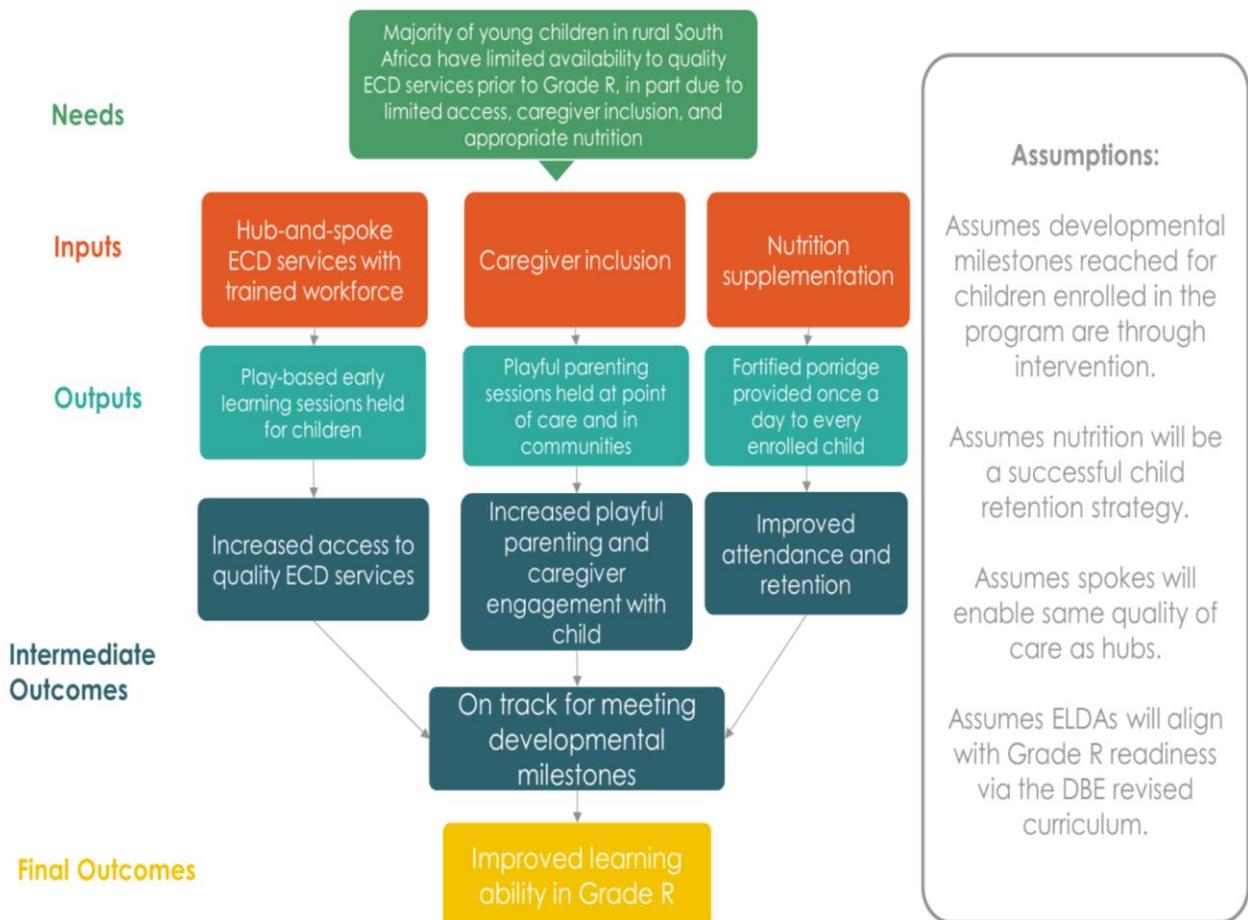
## 3. Program Theory of Change

This evaluation is expected to be explicitly grounded in the program's articulated Theory of Change. Please refer to the working version below; further input and revisions may be incorporated by the consortium of partners and will be communicated, and the selected evaluator may also propose relevant changes and refinements during the contracting period. The ToC reflects *Kuyakhanya*'s integrated, systems-oriented approach to ECD in rural South Africa, with key pathways of change across:

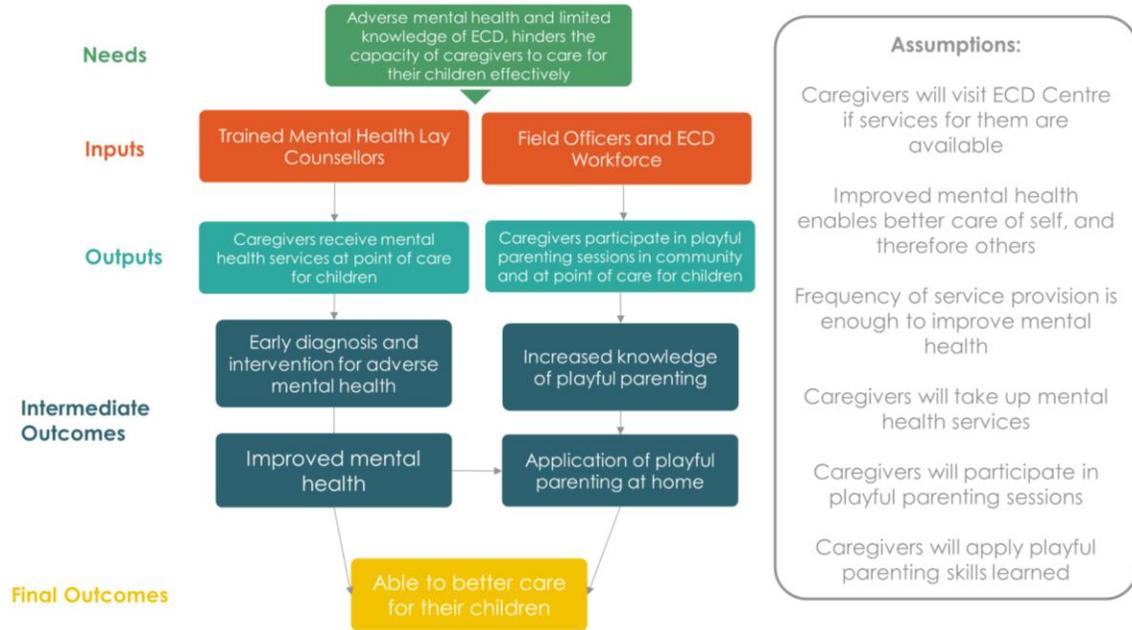
- Children (birth to five years)
- Caregivers
- ECD practitioners
- Community members

Applicants should demonstrate their experience and expertise of designing and implementing impact evaluations and propose a high-level design for the *Kuyakhanya* programme that will test, interrogate, and refine the embedded assumptions, causal pathways, and contextual moderators articulated in this ToC, including feedback loops and non-linear change processes.

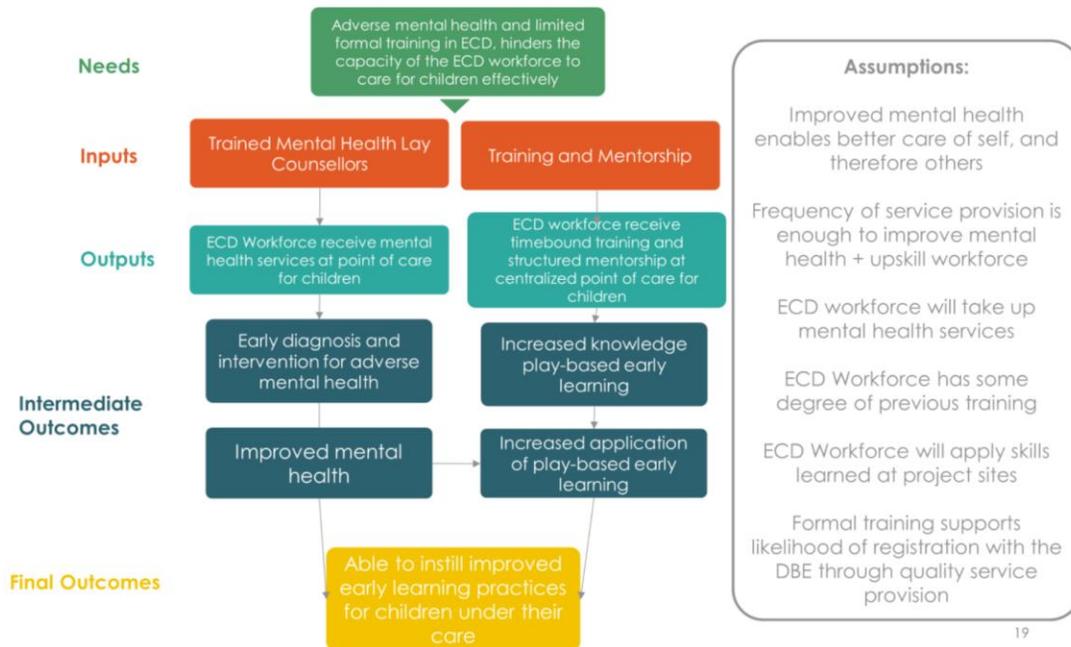
**Diagram 1:** Theory of change pathway for children.



**Diagram 2: Theory of change pathway for caregivers.**



**Diagram 3: Theory of change pathway for the ECD workforce.**



## 4. Purpose of the Evaluation

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to generate credible, actionable evidence on the extent to which *Kuyakhanya* contributes to strengthened nurturing care environments and improved ECD outcomes in rural South Africa, in alignment with national and global ECD priorities.

The evaluation is expected to:

- Assess changes in child development and wellbeing outcomes across domains emphasized in South Africa's Early Learning Developmental Areas (ELDAs).
- Examine immediate and intermediate outcomes at caregiver, practitioner, ECD centre, and community levels that enable nurturing care.
- Understand *how*, *why*, and *for whom* program effects occur, and under what contextual conditions.
- Showcase the cost effectiveness of the intervention, bearing in mind various intervention "packages" and operational costs (financial data will be made available to the selected evaluator for this purpose).
- Generate learning to support adaptive management, quality improvement, and scale considerations in line with South Africa's ECD 2030 Strategy.
- Contribute to the broader evidence base on integrated, systems-oriented ECD programming, specifically including mental health, in low-resource rural settings across low- and middle-income countries.

## 5. Key Evaluation Questions and Indicators

The following presents an early set of indicators that should be included or refined by the Impact Evaluation specialist. Applicants should consider how these measures can be compared between early learning centres engaged in *Kuyakhanya* versus those that are not, and where applicable with a focus on showcasing how *Kuyakhanya* contributes to these changes, if at all.

Applicants are invited to add to or adapt these indicators as they see fit, and should consider the purpose of the evaluation, as described above, when making changes or additions to these indicators.

### 5.1. Child-Level Outcomes

- The percentage of children meeting their age-appropriate developmental milestones in *Kuyakhanya*-enrolled centres.

- The number of children impacted by the ECD workforce trained by Kuyakhanya over a one-year, three-year, and five-year timeline.
- The percentage of children meeting their age appropriate developmental milestones if their caregiver(s) received and benefitted from mental health services versus those whose caregiver(s) did not, as outlined in the Caregiver outcomes.
- The percentage of children meeting their age appropriate developmental milestones based on their centre's performance as outlined in the Practitioner and ECD Centre outcomes.
- Change in attendance rates at early learning centres and attributed reasons, such as nutrition supplementation, quality of services, reduced fees, or other.

## **5.2. Caregiver Outcomes**

- The number of caregivers who receive mental health services, and its typologies (screening, counselling, referral).
- Percentage change in the number of caregivers who display knowledge of child developmental milestones and importance of integrated ECD.
- Percentage change in the distribution of mental health outcomes (mild/moderate/severe) across the focus areas (depression, anxiety, trauma).
- Percentage of caregivers screened and enrolled in mental health services whose children are enrolled at Kuyakhanya centres.

## **5.3. Practitioner and ECD Centre Outcomes**

- The number of ECD workforce members trained by Kuyakhanya.
- Percentage change in the ECD workforce's knowledge scores based on capacity building.
- Percentage change in the ECD centre's status score, attributed to quality of lessons, centre quality, other compliance requirements, as well as frequency of support visits required and/or re-training conducted.
- The number of ECD workforce members' who availed mental health services, including percentage of those screened who chose to enrol in mental health counselling or were referred.
- Percentage change in the distribution of mental health outcomes (mild/moderate/severe) across the focus areas (depression, anxiety, trauma).

## **5.4. Community-Level Outcomes**

- The number of people who have attended Kuyakhanya events.
- Percentage of people within the catchment areas who have been exposed to Kuyakhanya.

- Percentage change in the number of community members who display knowledge of importance of integrated ECD.
- The number of community members who receive mental health services, and its typologies (screening, counselling, referral), including percentage of those screened who chose to enrol in mental health counselling or were referred.
- Percentage change in the distribution of mental health outcomes (mild/moderate/severe) across the focus areas (depression, anxiety, trauma)

## 5.5. Implementation and Learning

- Which program components are most influential in driving observed outcomes?
- What adaptations emerge over time, and how do they affect results?
- What is the cost per beneficiary / the cost for the minimal viable intervention?
  - Ideally, this estimate will include a direct cost per beneficiary and an expanded cost per beneficiary, which considers the spillover effects and long-term impacts of the interventions (e.g. siblings of children in the Kuyakhanya program who benefit from the caregivers improved knowledge)
- What are the operational learning considerations for scale?

## 6. Evaluation Design and Methodological Expectations

IRD Global does not want to prioritize randomized controlled trials (RCTs) for this evaluation following the advice and perspective of our consortium partner, J-PAL Africa. Instead, applicants are explicitly encouraged to propose alternative, rigorous, and context-appropriate methodologies suited to complex, integrated ECD and mental health systems to showcase whether the programme is effective as per its ToC as compared with existing interventions.

Proposals should demonstrate methodological sophistication and feasibility, and may include (but are not limited to) the listed approaches:

- Mixed-methods impact evaluation
- Quasi-experimental designs (e.g., matched comparison groups, stepped or phased roll-out analyses)
- Systems-oriented methods (e.g., outcome harvesting, systems mapping, social network analysis)
- Implementation research
- Participatory and community-engaged research methods
- Theory-based evaluation (e.g., contribution analysis, realist evaluation)
- Longitudinal cohort or panel designs
- Developmental or adaptive evaluation approaches

- Comparative case studies across sites or districts

Applicants should clearly justify:

- Why the proposed design is appropriate given ethical, operational, and contextual realities
- How causal inference or contribution will be established without randomization
- How the design captures both outcomes and mechanisms of change

## 7. Data Sources and Measurement

Proposals should consider a combination of the following data sources, as appropriate:

- Child development assessments aligned with South African and global ECD frameworks, such as ELOM, QASS, and others
- Caregiver and household surveys
- Practitioner and ECD centre assessments and observations
- Program monitoring and administrative data
- Qualitative interviews, focus groups, and observations
- Community and systems-level data (e.g., referral pathways; service linkages; social and behavioural changes such as in perceptions, help-seeking, etc.)

Attention should be given to:

- Cultural and linguistic appropriateness
- Measurement validity and reliability in rural South African contexts
- Minimizing respondent burden

## 8. Equity, Ethics, and Safeguarding

The evaluation must:

- Adhere to GDPR and POPI Act ethical standards for research involving children and vulnerable populations
- Include clear child safeguarding and referral protocols
- Address issues of equity, gender, disability, and inclusion
- Ensure informed consent and community engagement throughout the research process

Ethics approval from a recognized institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee will be required. IRD and consortium partner, J-PAL Africa, can assist with this.

## 9. Deliverables

Expected deliverables may include:

- Phase 1 - Design & Inception
  - Inception report (proposed evaluation framework, methods, tools)
  - Validated data collection instruments
  - Pilot testing results and/or interim learning briefs or presentations
  - Learning workshop(s) with IRD Global and partners
  - Clean datasets and codebooks (where applicable)
  - Full and final proposal for evaluation and associated budget
- Phase 2 - Implementation (Indicative)
  - Finalized research protocol and tools, and associated approved ethical review
  - Baseline, midline, and endline reports (as applicable)
  - Interim learning briefs
  - Learning workshops with IRD Global and partners
  - Final impact evaluation report
  - Executive summary and policy brief
  - Clean datasets and codebooks
  - Handover documentation at contract close

All datasets and evaluation outputs will be owned by IRD Global unless otherwise agreed in writing.

## 10. Timeline

Applicants should propose a realistic timeline covering the time period till April 2029 as per the program deployment shown below:

Timeframe	Apr 2024 - Jun 2025 (KZN)				Jul 2025 - Jun 2026 (KZN)				Jul 2026 - Jun 2027 (TBD)				Jul 2027 - Jun 2028 (TBD)				Jul 2028 - Apr 2029 (4 provinces total)			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4												
<b>New Site</b>	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Sites</b>	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	5	6	7	9	11	14	15	15	15	15	15	15	15

- Inception and design
- Data collection waves
- Analysis and sense-making
- Reporting and dissemination

The anticipated evaluation duration is set between July 2026 to April 2029 allowing for longitudinal analysis, while the current period (till June 2026) prioritizes evaluation design, tool testing, and implementation planning.

Engagement will be structured in two phases:

- Phase 1 (April 2026 – June 2026): Design, refinement of ToC, ethics approval, tool validation, and implementation planning.
- Phase 2 (July 2026 – April 2029): Data collection waves, analysis, reporting, and dissemination.

Continuation into Phase 2 will be subject to satisfactory Phase 1 performance, funding availability, and separate contracting. No commitment to Phase 2 funding is implied through this RFP.

## 11. Organizational and Team Requirements

Eligible applicants include:

- Accredited research institutes, universities, or research consortia
- Teams with demonstrated expertise in ECD, mental health, education, or social development
- Experience conducting impact evaluations in low-resource or rural settings
- Applicants with South Africa-based presence or partnerships (preferred)

Teams should demonstrate:

- Interdisciplinary capacity (quantitative, qualitative, systems analysis)
- Experience with non-RCT causal inference methods
- Commitment to ethical, participatory, and decolonial research practices

## 12. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals should include:

- a) Technical proposal (maximum 20 pages), including:
  - Proposed evaluation design and methodology

- Theory of change alignment
  - Sampling and analysis plan
  - Gantt chart
  - Ethical considerations
  - Management and staffing plan
  - Organizational profile and relevant experience + CVs of key personnel
  - Examples of relevant past evaluations
- b) Financial Proposal
- Detailed financial proposal for April-June 2026 with justification, including licensing softwares or tools
  - Indicative costing framework for Phase 2
  - Clear cost assumptions

#### Budget Information

- The anticipated budget range for Phase 1 (Evaluation Design & Inception) is approximately USD 25,000–30,000.
- Applicants should propose a proportionate and cost approach aligned with this range.
- Financial proposals will be assessed based on value for money, cost realism, and alignment with the proposed methodology.

#### Language & Currency

- Proposals must be submitted in English, and all budget amounts should be quoted in the United States Dollar (USD).

## 13. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed based on:

- Methodological rigor and appropriateness (35%)
- Alignment with *Kuyakhanya's* systems-oriented integrated ECD approach (15%)
- Feasibility and value for money (30%)
- Team expertise and contextual understanding (15%)
- Commitment to co-learning, equity, and ethical practice (5%)

## 14. Procurement Timeline

The anticipated timeline for this procurement process is outlined below. IRD Global reserves the right to adjust dates as necessary.

- RFP Issuance: February 24, 2026
- Deadline for Submission of Questions: March 3, 2026
- Responses to Questions: March 6, 2026
- Proposal Submission Deadline: March 17, 2026 (23:59 SAST)
- Proposal Review Period: March 18 – March 31, 2026
- Partner Selection & Notification: April 3, 2026
- Anticipated Contract Start Date: April 15, 2026

## 15. Submission Details

Please submit your full proposal as a single PDF file to:

- **Email:** [procurement@ird.global](mailto:procurement@ird.global)
- **Subject Line:** Proposal Submission - Impact Evaluation of IRD Global's Kuyakhanya Program
- **Submission Deadline:** March 17, 2026

Note:

- Late submissions will not be considered; only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.
- IRD reserves the right to reject any proposal without providing reasons, negotiate scope and budget with shortlisted applicants, and re-issue the RFP if deemed necessary.
- Any attempt by a bidder to influence, directly or indirectly, the outcome of the evaluation process outside the formal process may result in immediate disqualification.
- By submitting a proposal, the bidder confirms that they have read, understood, and agreed to the Terms of Participation (Annexure A), which form an integral part of this RFP.

## 16. Contact for Clarifications

All questions must be submitted in writing to [procurement@ird.global](mailto:procurement@ird.global) March 3, 2026. All questions must be submitted by the stated deadline, and answers will be shared in a consolidated FAQ with all interested applicants to ensure fairness.

Note: All applying organizations and any sub-contractors must comply with IRD's safeguarding, child protection, and data protection policies. All project staff are required to complete safeguarding training prior to program start.

## 17. Payment Terms

Payments will be milestone-based and contingent upon satisfactory delivery of agreed deliverables.

## 18. Right to Verification

IRD reserves the right to verify the information provided in proposals and to conduct due diligence checks before awarding a contract.

*IRD Global is committed to evidence generation that strengthens practice, centres community realities, and advances equitable early childhood development.*

## **Annexure – A (Terms of Participation)**

### **1. Introduction**

These Terms of Participation should be read in conjunction with the RFP Documents.

### **2. Conduct**

- 2.1 The Supplier must abide by these Terms of Participation and any instructions given in the RFP Documents and agrees to ensure that any of its directors, office holders, staff, contractors, sub-contractors and advisers involved or connected with this RFP abide by the same.
- 2.2 The Supplier must not directly or indirectly canvass any director, officer, employee, agent or adviser of the Company regarding this RFP or attempt to obtain any information from the same regarding this RFP (except where permitted by this RFP). Any attempt by the Supplier to do so may result in the Supplier's disqualification from this RFP process.

### **3. Collusive Behaviour**

- 3.1 A Supplier must not (and shall ensure that its directors, employees, sub-contractors and advisers do not):
  - 3.1.1 Fix or adjust any element of the Proposal by agreement or arrangement with any other person, except where such prohibited acts are undertaken with persons who are participants in the Supplier's proposal;
  - 3.1.2 Communicate with any person other than the Company the value, price or rates set out in the Proposal, except where such communication is undertaken with persons who are participants in the Supplier's proposal; and
  - 3.1.3 Enter into any agreement or arrangement with any other person, so that person refrains from submitting a Proposal.
- 3.2 Breach by a Supplier of paragraph 3.1 will give the Company the right to disqualify the Supplier from the RFP process.

### **4. Right to Cancel or Vary the Procurement**

- 4.1 The Company reserves the right:
  - 4.1.1 To change the basis of its procedures for the RFP without notice at any time;
  - 4.1.2 To amend, clarify, add to or withdraw all or any part of the RFP Documents at any time;

- 4.1.3 To vary any timetable or deadlines set out in the RFP Documents;
- 4.1.4 Not to award a contract for some or all the Goods and/or Services for which Proposals are invited; and
- 4.1.5 To cancel all or part of the RFP process at any stage and at any time.

## 5. Status of the RFP Documents

- 5.1 No information contained in the RFP Documents or in any communication made between the Company and the Supplier in connection with the RFP shall be relied upon as constituting a contract, agreement or representation that any contract shall be entered into in accordance with the Proposal or at all.
- 5.2 The Company shall not be committed to any course of action as a result of:
  - 5.2.1 Issuing any RFP Documents;
  - 5.2.2 Communicating with Supplier or their representatives, agents or advisers in respect of this RFP.
- 5.3 The RFP Documents and any attachments or references have been prepared in good faith but do not purport to be a comprehensive statement of all matters relevant to the procurement nor has it been independently verified. Neither the Company nor its advisers, directors, officers, employees or other staff or agents:
  - 5.3.1 Accept any liability or responsibility for the adequacy, accuracy or completeness of the RFP Documents; or
  - 5.3.2 Make any representation or warranty, express or implied, with respect to the information the RFP Documents contain nor shall any of them be liable for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication.
- 5.4 The Supplier shall form its own conclusions and make its own independent assessment of the requirements in this RFP and should seek its own financial and legal advice about the methods and resources needed to meet the Company's requirements.
- 5.5 The Company does not accept responsibility for the Supplier's assessment of the requirements of this RFP.
- 5.6 The Supplier is responsible at its own expense, for obtaining all information required to prepare its Proposal.

## 6. Costs

- 6.1 The Company will not reimburse any costs incurred by a Supplier (including the costs or expenses of any sub-contractors or advisers) in connection with the preparation and/or submission of the Supplier's Proposal, including where:

- 6.1.1 The procurement is cancelled, shortened, or delayed for any reason;
- 6.1.2 All or any part of the RFP Documents is at any time amended, clarified, added to, or withdrawn for any reason;
- 6.1.3 A contract for some or all of the goods and/or services for which Proposals are invited is not concluded; or
- 6.1.4 The Supplier and/or its Proposal is disqualified from participation in the procurement for any reason.

## 7. Confidentiality

- 2.1 Subject to the exceptions referred to in paragraph 7.2, the contents of the RFP Documents (together, the “**Information**”) are being made available to the Supplier on the condition that the Supplier:
  - 2.1.1 always treats the RFP Documents as confidential, unless it is already in the public domain;
  - 2.1.2 does not disclose, copy, reproduce, distribute or pass any of the Information to any other person at any time or allow any of these things to happen;
  - 2.1.3 only uses the Information for the purposes of preparing a Response (or deciding whether to respond).
- 2.2 A Supplier may disclose any of the Information to its employees, advisers or sub-contractors provided that:
  - 2.2.1 this is done for the sole purpose of enabling the Supplier to submit a Response and the person receiving the Information undertakes in writing to keep the Information confidential on the same terms imposed by these Terms of Participation; or
  - 2.2.2 it obtains the Company’s prior written consent in relation to such disclosure; or
  - 2.2.3 the Supplier is legally required to make such a disclosure.
- 2.3 The Company may freely disclose information submitted by Service Providers during the procurement to its officers, employees, group companies, agents or advisers but will otherwise, subject to paragraph 7.2(c), keep the information confidential.

## 8. IPRs

- 8.1 All RFP Documents issued in connection with this procurement shall remain the property of the Company and shall be used by the Potential Supplier only for the purposes of this procurement.

- 8.2 The Potential Supplier grants the Company an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive licence to copy, amend and reproduce any intellectual property contained within the Proposal for the purposes of carrying out this procurement.

## 9. Law and Jurisdiction

- 9.1 Any dispute (including non-contractual disputes or claims) relating to this procurement or the RFP Documents shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of the Republic of South Africa.
- 9.2 The courts of the Republic of South Africa shall have the exclusive jurisdiction to settle any dispute or claim that arises out of or in connection with this procurement or the RFP Documents (including non-contractual disputes or claims).