

**CAPE HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM (CHEC) /  
WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT (WCG)  
JOINT TASK TEAM (JTT)**

**CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS**

**2025/2026**

**1. BACKGROUND TO THIS CALL**

The CHEC-WCG JTT funds research that tests assumptions, poses novel questions and generates insight. This exploratory process has informed practical recommendations and viable solutions. Given this approach, the CHEC-WCG JTT has been instrumental in funding research projects that address the multifaceted developmental priorities of the Western Cape province.

Society's established, reliable systems are being disrupted. For instance, the geopolitical system is fragmenting, natural systems are crumbling, urban systems are overwhelmed, government fiscal systems are strained, and technological systems are experiencing a fever-pitch process of creative destruction. Rapid, unprecedented change creates instability and challenges. However, it also presents an opportunity for the constructive disruption of systems and their transformation.

The 2025/2026 JTT Research Call invites researchers to explore whether instability and uncertainty across economic, political, technological, environmental, and legal systems can create opportunities for co-creating solutions that transform these systems, a prerequisite for a more sustainable and balanced society to emerge in the Western Cape. Essentially, the JTT Research Call asks researchers to draw on their academic rigour to define and analyse a problem (i.e. the so-called "what") and combine it with ingenuity and creativity to propose ways of doing things differently. (i.e. the "so what" and "now what").

Two themes for the JTT Research Call have been identified, and research proposals should cover one of the themes. The first theme is understanding the characteristics of a future-fit public institution and applying them to public institutions operating in the Western Cape, preferably at the regional and local government levels. The second theme concerns improving the state of the Western Cape's network industries regarding their coverage, operational efficiency, service quality, and accessibility to poorer households.

## **2. THE TWO THEMATIC AREAS**

### **2.1. Thematic Area One: Future-fit public institutions and functions**

The public sector faces greater demand for services from residents while traditional funding sources are declining. Governments are under pressure to extend the reach of existing services and develop new services arising from fluid geopolitical, economic, environmental, and social conditions. Furthermore, these fluid conditions have disrupted established socio-economic development models. People today feel their standard of living will fall below their parents', and gaps between classes' access to opportunities and incomes will widen.

At the same time, the unprecedented development of communication technologies has given people the power to voice their dissatisfaction and form influential lobbying groups that agitate for change. Technology has enabled the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which has amplified people's distrust in the prevailing socio-economic system and disconnection with public sector institutions.

Public institutions face a challenging situation. People want public sector institutions to provide personalised services and feedback faster, but legacy systems and processes make this problematic. Making new investments and designing innovative services requires capital and skilled people with the time to be creative. However, these conditions don't exist in a fiscally constrained environment.

The issue underpinning the future-fit public institution theme is using today's pressures—tighter budgets, increased responsibilities, and eroded public trust—as a catalyst to reimagine public institutions. For instance, how can public institutions better anticipate future needs and invest in physical and intangible assets today that allow them to provide good-quality services, irrespective of the prevailing conditions? Furthermore, how can public institutions enhance their insight to realise that changed external conditions require them to abandon their planned path and swiftly adopt a different one?

No two public institutions are alike, even when they operate in the same sphere and have the same mandated function. The primary public institution selected for analysis must provide goods and services in the Western Cape, such as a regional government, municipality, higher-education institution, or State-Owned Agencies (i.e. Port of Cape Town or PRASA). Consequently, in-depth research needs to be conducted for a specific public-sector institution, and the institution is the unit of analysis for the research call. However, research is not limited to a single institution. National and international public institutions can be used for illustrative purposes, such as demonstrating principles, applying recommendations and showcasing lessons. Nevertheless, research should not be based on a generic institution group, such as “Western Cape municipalities” or “Western Cape universities.”

The future-fit public institution theme has three research objectives.

- I. Understand the characteristics of a future-fit public sector institution. At a practical level, what are a future-fit public institution's core organisational capacities enabling nimbleness, ingenuity, and sustainability in a volatile and complex environment? At a minimum, this exploration should cover capacities under the

following broad categories: (a) strategic sensing and anticipation, (b) learning and innovation, (c) collaboration and ecosystems, (d) digital and technology, (e) human capital, (f) purpose and values, (g) financing (h) customer-centric delivery.<sup>1</sup>

- II. Identify and analyse the critical two or three future-fit capacities for the selected primary public sector institution based on the research covered in the first question.
- III. Suggest the “top 5” interventions needed to enhance or build the selected public sector institution's capacities from its current state to one of a future-fit organisation explored in question II. Furthermore, a comprehensive explanation of these interventions is required, which includes potential paths to close the capacity gap under different scenarios. For example, a public sector institution's potential gap regarding its “purpose and value” capacities could entail exploring how to maintain purpose alignment during rapid change, adapting current approaches to more effectively translate organisational purpose into decision-making frameworks, or how purpose orientation affects long-term organisational resilience. Another example is exploring “financial capacity,” which could involve understanding the public institutions' ability to link financial and non-financial value creation, value measurement across multiple capitals (financial, human, natural, etc.), diversified revenue stream potential, financial shock absorption mechanisms, and access to diverse funding sources (debt, equity, grants, etc.).

## **2.2. Thematic Area Two: The State of Network Industries in the Western Cape**

Network industries include telecommunications networks, electricity grids and utilities, railways and transportation systems, pipeline networks (oil, gas, water, sewage), digital platforms and social media, payment systems and financial networks.

Network industries operate in a complex landscape. They face multiple challenges, such as fragmented network systems, critical backlogs, uneven development between urban and rural areas, financial constraints, technological malaise, and operational inefficiency. Furthermore, the structure of these industries complicates solving their challenges. For instance, the delicate interplay between state-owned enterprises and partial privatisation efforts, regulatory uncertainty, and inconsistent policy implementation has increased investment risk and reduced foreign direct investment. Limited capital is one of the factors contributing to ageing infrastructure requiring extensive rehabilitation, limited technological innovation, the slow adoption of advanced technologies, and the inadequate maintenance of existing network systems.

While facing challenges, network industries are under momentous pressure to deliver better-quality services to more people at a cheaper cost. Achieving this goal will require radical changes to their structure and the conduct and performance of public and

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<sup>1</sup>. Examples of resident-centric capacities are personalising customer touchpoints at scale, co-creating solutions with customers, and balancing digital and human engagement channels.

private entities. Transforming network industries must recognise dynamic feedback loops between a market's structure, entities' delivery model, and service quality, including customer experience.

The state of development across network industries is uneven. Furthermore, although network industries have similar challenges, their causes and on-the-ground impact differ. Telecommunications, energy, and transportation sectors continue to grapple with significant institutional inefficiencies, with state-owned entities like Eskom (electricity) and Transnet (logistics) experiencing persistent operational challenges that impede national economic productivity. The telecommunications sector has shown more dynamism, with increased private sector participation and technological innovation, though regulatory frameworks remain inconsistent, and infrastructure investment is uneven across urban and rural regions.

Consequently, this research call asks researchers to select a network industry, such as transport, electricity, water, or sewage systems. However, researchers can draw on innovations or lessons from other network industries. Furthermore, significant disparities exist between a network industry operating in an urban or rural environment across key metrics (e.g., investment, adequate maintenance, governance, and financial management). These differences indicate that spatial attributes could influence the scope of the research area in the research proposal. For example, the network industry could cover the Cape Town city-region, secondary cities, or rural towns.

The overarching research objective for the state of network industries in the Western Cape is to identify core interventions that can deliver better-quality, reliable services to more people across society at a cheaper cost within a resource-constrained, uncertain socio-economic environment.

The theme of the state of network industries in the Western Cape has three research objectives.

- I. Understand the factors shaping the development and performance of the selected network industry in the Western Cape, and the critical barriers to its effective transformation. For instance, this analysis could consider the following factors: institutional governance and structural rigidities, financial and investment dynamics, technological innovation, and the regulatory and policy environment.
- II. Provide a strategy to improve the selected network industry's coverage, reliability, efficiency (e.g. cost containment mechanisms and technological innovation including different business models), quality of services and greater access for poor households. For instance, the strategy could explore the following issues: <sup>2</sup>
  - How can public-private partnerships be structured to facilitate infrastructure expansion in areas with limited economic viability?
  - What technological innovations can reduce the cost-of-service extension in rural and low-income areas?

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<sup>2</sup> Claude AI generated the questions.

- How can cross-subsidisation and innovative funding models be developed to support infrastructure development in a constrained fiscal environment?
  - What organisational restructuring strategies can improve operational efficiency and reduce systemic cost?
- III. Suggest recommendations to make the selected network industry more climate-resilient, focusing on infrastructure design, construction, and maintenance and increasing private sector investment. According to PwC (2025), in 2024/2024, there was a R 7 billion capital shortfall to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by extreme weather events (e.g., flooding, droughts, and wildfires) in the Western Cape.<sup>3</sup> Over the longer term, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure is the logical option. When heavier rains damage roads, bridges collapse due to severe flooding in rivers, and power grids buckle under increasingly stronger winds, it disrupts the economy and people's lives. However, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure is more expensive in the short term. This additional expense has become a barrier, especially when the fiscus is constrained and the government battles to fund traditional infrastructure.

### **3. PROPOSALS – APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS**

#### **3.1. Minimum requirements in proposals**

All proposals must:

- Be submitted on the template provided in Appendix 1.
- Include information about both the main researchers and the WCG partner.
- Include a description of research approaches, activities and methods.
- Explain the way(s) in which the project and its outcomes respond to the research objectives.
- Provide a work plan that aligns with project objectives. The work plan must take into account the deadlines for project deliverables and the final reports.

#### **3.2. Research budget**

This call is intended to attract proposals up to a total amount of R 150,000 per project.

The proposed budget needs to be justified in terms of project activities and outcomes / outputs. The costs of salaries, equipment and travel beyond the Western Cape cannot be funded.

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<sup>3</sup> PwC. 2025. Budget 2025: Responsible growth for a sustainable future. Accessed March 2025: <https://www.pwc.co.za/en/assets/pdf/budget-2025.pdf>

It is expected that the funds will be used for work completed within the university by staff or students under the supervision of staff, rather than outsourcing the research activities to external third parties.

Any additional funding received and / or expected from other sources (e.g. the NRF) must be fully declared in the application.

### **3.3. Evaluation of proposals**

A two-stage process will be followed in the evaluation and selection of proposals for this award.

Institutional researchers interested in applying for the CHEC / WCG funding need to submit a completed proposal (using the template) to the member of the Joint Task Team at their university for internal review by **Monday 30 June 2025**. The name and email address of the institutional representative is:

- UCT: Sonwabo Ngcelwane ([sonwabo.ngcelwane@uct.ac.za](mailto:sonwabo.ngcelwane@uct.ac.za))

Proposals selected in the first stage will then be considered by the JTT and selected members of the Community of Experts (COE), comprising thought leaders and experts from government, academia, and industry, will assess proposals.

The following two criteria will be foregrounded in evaluating the proposals:

- Proposals must exhibit the capability to be applied in real-world scenarios.
- Proposals incorporating research partners from business and industry as well as the WCG will be preferred. Where necessary, requests to the Joint Task Team to assist with facilitating connections between university and WCG Departments and staff should be sent to [debbie@chec.ac.za](mailto:debbie@chec.ac.za) as soon as possible.

See Appendix 2 for all the questions that will be considered during the evaluation process.

The JTT reserves the right to engage with researchers and, where necessary, discuss the modification of the costing of particular aspects of the work.

## **4. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

The funding is for a period of a year. A progress report will be required by the end of January 2026 and a project report is required at the end of August 2026. Both reports should be submitted to the institutional representatives. Note that the reports should be accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences. Guidelines for these report are attached in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

In the unlikely event that no final report is received, the researchers will be expected to repay the monies allocated.

See below:

Appendix 1: Application template

Appendix 2: Questions to guide the evaluation process

Appendix 3: Guidelines for progress reports

Appendix 4: Guidelines for the final project report

## Appendix 1

**Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) /  
Western Cape Government (WCG)**

**JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMME 2025/2026**

**Project Funding Application**

### 1. Project title

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|--|
|  |
|--|

### 2. Main Researcher's Details

|            |  |              |  |       |  |
|------------|--|--------------|--|-------|--|
| Surname    |  | Initials     |  | Title |  |
| University |  |              |  |       |  |
| Faculty    |  | Dept. / Unit |  |       |  |
| E-mail     |  | Tel (office) |  |       |  |
|            |  | Mobile       |  |       |  |

### 3. Additional University Researcher's Details

|            |  |              |  |       |  |
|------------|--|--------------|--|-------|--|
| Surname    |  | Initials     |  | Title |  |
| University |  |              |  |       |  |
| Faculty    |  | Dept. / Unit |  |       |  |
| E-mail     |  | Tel (office) |  |       |  |
|            |  | Mobile       |  |       |  |

### 4. Main Provincial Partner's Details

|            |  |           |  |       |  |
|------------|--|-----------|--|-------|--|
| Surname    |  | Initials  |  | Title |  |
| Department |  |           |  |       |  |
| E-mail     |  | Telephone |  |       |  |

### 5. Provide details of your proposed research project

|                                                                                                                               |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <p><b><i>Summarise your collective qualifications and experience – explain how these are relevant to the project.</i></b></p> |  |
| <p><b><i>Describe how the project responds to the research call</i></b></p>                                                   |  |
| <p><b><i>Research design and methods</i></b></p>                                                                              |  |
| <p><b><i>Envisaged outputs and outcomes</i></b></p>                                                                           |  |

|                                                                        |                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>List project partners and describe their role(s) in the project</b> | <p><b>(i) Partners</b></p> <p><b>(ii) Western Cape Government Partners</b></p> <p><b>(iii) Industry / business Partners</b></p> |
| <b>Time-frame and project work plan</b>                                |                                                                                                                                 |

## 6. Budget: requests

| Kindly adhere to below description of budget line items                                                              |                                 |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| Each and every budget ITEM should be <b>motivated</b> in such a way that it <b>justifies</b> the amount/s requested. |                                 |        |
| Budget items must be fully described and aligned with the project work-plan provided in Section 3 above.             |                                 |        |
|                                                                                                                      | Description of budget line item | Amount |
| a.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| b.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| c.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| d.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| e.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| f.                                                                                                                   |                                 |        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                         |                                 |        |

## 7. Other sources of funding received / expected

Please list other sources of funding you have received and expect to receive for this project.

| Please complete this table |                                                    |        |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------|
|                            | Other sources of funding received for this project | Amount |
| a.                         |                                                    |        |
| b.                         |                                                    |        |
| c.                         |                                                    |        |
| d.                         |                                                    |        |
| e.                         |                                                    |        |
| f.                         |                                                    |        |
| TOTAL                      |                                                    |        |

### ADJUDICATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

#### WCG - CHEC Projects

#### Key questions to be addressed when evaluating and selecting proposals:

1. **Inclusion of a diverse and useful set of representatives:** Does the proposal demonstrate existing relationships with business and industry? Does it include research partners in the WCG?
2. **Responsiveness to the call's priorities:** Will the study address the sectors and themes identified in the call?
3. **Research Methodology / Methods / Activities:** Do the methods align with sound research practice? Are they also aligned with the research call question / objectives?
4. **Envisaged outputs and outcomes:** Will the envisaged outputs and outcomes speak to the needs of the different stakeholders, e.g. will the outputs and outcomes result in recommendations for the WCG, CHEC, universities and other sectors in the development of a regional innovation system?
5. **Time-frame and workplan:** Is the work plan realistic - and will it result in the desired outcomes?
6. **Budget:** Are budget items clearly motivated? Are there any inappropriate budget items (such as funding for augmenting salaries covered by the core establishment of the university)?

### Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) / Western Cape Government (WCG)

#### Guidelines for Progress Reports

It is requested that the following information be provided in the **progress report** of approximately 5 - 8 pages. It is important that this report be accessible to a wide audience, including academics, government officials, and practitioners.

#### 1. COVER PAGE

Researcher's name, department / unit, faculty, university, contact addresses and phone numbers.

WCG partner's name and position, contact addresses and phone numbers.

Title of project.

#### 2. ABSTRACT

In addition to a summary of the key aspects of the project, the abstract should highlight the value of the project to knowledge generation in universities and its linkages to the priorities of the WCG.

#### 3. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS / QUESTIONS

Reference to the objectives and outcomes specified in the funding proposal should be included in this section.

#### 4. COMPLETED ACTIVITIES

A short summary of the completed activities should be provided.

#### 5. CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Briefly refer to any challenges experienced and outline the solutions to these.

#### 6. BUDGET

Please reflect the actual spend to date against the budget included in the original proposal.

### Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) / Western Cape Government (WCG)

#### Guidelines for Final Project Reports

It is requested that the following information be provided in the **final report** of approximately 8 – 10 pages. It is important that this report be accessible to a wide audience, including academics, government officials, and practitioners.

#### 1. COVER PAGE

Researcher's name, department / unit, faculty, university, contact addresses and phone numbers.

WCG partner's name and position, contact addresses and phone numbers.

Title of project.

#### 2. ABSTRACT

In addition to a summary of the key aspects of the project, the abstract should highlight the value of the project to knowledge generation in universities and its linkages to the priorities of the WCG.

#### 3. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT AIMS / QUESTIONS

Reference to the objectives and outcomes specified in the funding proposal should be included in this section.

#### 4. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

A short summary of the approach and methods used should be included, but detailed descriptions of highly technical processes may be omitted.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTION

This is the most critical aspect of the report in that it needs to synthesise the findings, draw conclusions and suggest follow-up actions, e.g. for further research, policy development and implementation.

#### 6. BUDGET

Please reflect the actual spend against the budget included in the original proposal.