

STAFF NEWS • RESEARCH GRANTS

Inside UMI's Grant-Writing Seminar: The Craft, the Systems, and What It Takes to Win - and Hold - a Grant

Colleagues went inside the assessor's mind, heard how a Ugandan public institution built a grants powerhouse from scratch, confronted the money, and worked a live grant call at their cluster tables.

Venue: Jubilee Building (Room 4)

On Thursday, the 23rd July 2026, UMI staff and associates filled Room 4 of the Jubilee Building for the Institute's first Grant-Writing Seminar - a deliberately hands-on working session run by the Institute Research and Innovation Centre (IRIC). The seminar was an opportunity for colleagues to have a far clearer picture of why research proposals succeed or fail, how a bid now moves through UMI's new grants process, and what support the Research Grants Office provides at every stage.

The day was designed and led by Dr. Dennis Aguma, Research Grants Officer. With Prof. Rose B. Namara, Chief of IRIC, away on leave, Dr. Aguma also delivered the Centre's framing and closing on her behalf.

The seminar was formally opened by **Assoc. Prof. S. Kasozi Mulindwa, Director of Programmes and Students Affairs**, and drew on some of the region's most grant-active practitioners to teach the craft - and the institutional discipline - of winning research funding.

If you could not be there, this bulletin captures what was said, session by session, and how to put it to use now.



How the morning worked

This was not a lecture. It was an engaging and hands-on session. Dr Aguma started by sharing some insights from the recent UMI research grants survey, giving the room its own baseline diagnostic. The obstacles named there set the agenda for the panel and the clinic that followed. Colleagues were eventually seated by research clusters (RC1–RC7) and moved between short expert inputs, a moderated panel, and a hands-on clinic in which each cluster worked an imaginary grants call. Expert sessions were supported by slides, which - together with the templates and the example from the hands-on clinic are collected in the toolkit folder below.

What the speakers said

Opening & framing - *IRIC welcome (delivered by Dr. Aguma on behalf of Prof. Namara)*

Dr. Aguma opened on behalf of IRIC, setting out the Centre's expectations and the support now available, before inviting Prof. Mulindwa to deliver the official opening address.

Assoc. Prof. S. Kasozi Mulindwa - *Director of Programmes and Students Affairs*

The Director emphasised that **research grants are how UMI resources and elevates its research-led mandate** - by funding the research, developing academic staff, and building the evidence base a degree-granting institution must stand on. He further signalled that, in the not-too-distant future, success in winning research grants will become a key measure of staff development and academic progression.



- Since 2004, UMI has carried a dual mandate - a Management Development Institute that also grants degrees. Being research-led is an obligation to be resourced, not an aspiration to recite.
- Internal budgets alone cannot carry that ambition; serious research institutions finance discovery through competitive external grants, and UMI - with its heritage and national footprint - can compete.
- The binding constraint has never been ideas or opportunities, but the institutional capacity to turn an idea into a competitive, compliant proposal and manage it to donor standard - exactly what this seminar builds.
- This is being built into UMI's governance - operationally through the Research Grants Office, and through the Senate Sub-Committee on Research and Innovations for policy and the research grant calls to come - with the academic leadership behind it.
- Prof. Mulindwa also announced UMI's upcoming Internal Research Grants Call, funded under the UGX 2 billion FY2026/27 Research Agenda, which is squarely aligned to the government's social economic agenda. He encouraged colleagues to take advantage of this and publish, thereby continuing to position UMI as the institution that builds the leadership and evidence base for national transformation.

Dr. Dennis Aguma - *Research Grants Officer · The Grants Office: process, templates & architecture*

The day's core session - moving from diagnosis to system.

Dr. Aguma walked colleagues through the findings from the previous research grants survey, highlighting the challenges, and proceeded to share the new grants machinery now in place to support them.



- Why we are reviving research clusters
- The internal grants process, end to end: how a bid now moves through UMI from idea to submission, award and close-out.
- The Grants Management templates and where each one sits along that journey.
- UMI's three-part grants architecture: Acquisition → Support & Quality Assurance → Knowledge Translation.
- What the Research Grants Office does for colleagues at every stage - so that no one writes a proposal alone.
- What support is available from the research grants office.

Prof. Ernest Abaho - *Makerere University Business School · Anatomy of a fundable proposal*

The practical heart of the day - inside the assessor's mind.



In a very candid, and quite interactive manner, Prof. Abaho showed, concretely, what separates a funded proposal from a merely competent one. His central message: ***the work that decides a proposal happens long before the deadline – and continues outside of institutional walls***. His session covered aspects, including:

- What an assessor actually looks for - and the common reasons strong ideas still fail to secure funding.
- Positioning, partnerships and readiness before the call opens.
- Stakeholder management in an academic setting - aligning co-investigators, departments and partners behind a single, coherent bid.

Dr. Nixon Niyonzima, PhD - *Uganda Cancer Institute · Building an institution that wins - and holds - grants*

The session many will remember most - proof of what is possible.



If Prof. Abaho showed the craft, Dr. Niyonzima showed the destination. He told the story of the Uganda Cancer Institute in full - from its inception to the mature, internationally funded research directorate it runs today - and in doing so made UMI's ambition feel not abstract but achievable. His account gave institutional context to Prof. Abaho's craft points and painted a clear picture of what UMI can become.

- How UCI built the systems, staffing and governance of a research directorate capable of attracting and absorbing major international funding - and in what sequence.
- Institutional absorptive capacity: what convinces donors that an institution - not just an investigator - can hold their money (financial management, compliance, ethics, reporting discipline).
- What breaks first when an institution wins grants it is not ready for - and how UCI avoided or recovered from those failure points.

- A candid, practitioner's account, including what was hard - the kind of honest institutional history that makes the destination credible.

Mr. James Luzige - *Institute Bursar · The money conversation: budgeting & overheads*

Unsurprisingly, this session drew the most questions. The Bursar brought the authority of Finance to the part of a proposal colleagues are least equipped to get right on their own:

- Direct versus indirect costs - and why unrecovered overhead can quietly turn a grant into a net loss.
- UMI's institutional fee structure set against donor overhead caps, and what happens to recovered funds - including any researcher incentive share - once a grant is won.
- Building a credible, compliant budget, and avoiding the costing errors that trigger audit queries.
- The financial benefit to staff of participating in research grants, and how this is treated in a typical award.



Panel Discussion

The facilitators took questions from colleagues as a panel. Unsurprisingly, the question of how UMI rewards staff who bring in grants generated the most interest - with colleagues drawing comparisons between UMI and other institutions, particularly the degree of control PIs have over their budgets. This question of control, or perceived lack thereof, colleagues argued, risked encouraging the practice of running grants privately, outside the Institute, rather than channelling them through UMI. The discussion was revealing, and also underscored an important point of governance: channelling grants through UMI is not only how staff access the Institute's incentive structure, but also the compliant path under UMI's Partnerships and Collaborations Policy - protecting both the researcher and the Institute from legal and reputational exposure. The Grants team will circulate further detail on the incentive structure, and on correct routing, in due course - aspects of which are already addressed in the draft Grants Policy and Grants Manual, which, as requested, have been made available in the folder for colleagues to review and comment on ahead of institutional approval.



The working clinic: live call

The afternoon put the morning to work. Seated in their research clusters and supported by Dr. Aguma, colleagues were handed a call document and worked it through five tasks:

1. **Build a template** capturing everything the application would require.
2. **Map the institutional machinery** - UMI's internal processes, tools and instruments needed before submission.
3. **Articulate UMI's comparative advantage** in relation to the call - why UMI, and not another institution.
4. **Set out the M&E** - post-award expectations and the documents they require.
5. **Identify the audit queries** the bid could attract - and how to avoid them.



A share-back then pulled the headline outputs together, with Dr. Aguma closing on next steps and the support available, before a working lunch for cluster networking and one-to-one support.

A note on the Internal Research Grants Call

The Institute's forthcoming Internal Research Grants Call was discussed as the clear next step, but it was not launched on the day. It is moving through the Institute's governance for endorsement and will be formally announced when it opens. In the meantime, the tools and the Grants Office are already available to you.

Get the tools: templates, slides & the clinic call

The complete toolkit is now available to all staff, as promised - the Grants Management templates, the seminar slides used in the session, and the live Call for Proposals worked through at the clinic tables.

The folder also contains the draft Grants Policy and draft Grants Operations Manual. A number of colleagues indicated they would like to contribute to these drafts, in the spirit of good policy development practice. Once you have reviewed them, kindly submit your input within the next week, ahead of the drafts being forwarded to top management for final discussion and ratification.

The seminar toolkit folder

Grants Management System (GMS) templates - the full grant lifecycle:

→ See IRIC Grants Resource Folder - <https://cloud.umi.ac.ug/index.php/s/T1ZttTHRcpAV9gn>

Presenters' slides (as shown on 23 July), and the clinic call document (worked at the cluster tables):

→ <https://cloud.umi.ac.ug/index.php/s/PtPfkWtZqXXXxsT>

Trouble opening the folder? Contact IT to get access to UMI Cloud.

If everything fails, please contact the IRIC Office (Ms. Yvonne Kembabazi - details below) and access will be granted.

What to do next

Whether or not you were in the room, here is how to convert the day into practice:

1. **Adopt the templates now** - use the GMS suite from your very next concept note.
2. **Route every proposal through the Research Grants Office** before submission - this is now the single institutional route, and it strengthens your bid while protecting UMI.
3. **Book a one-to-one clinic** with the Grants Office on a specific idea or call.
4. **Watch out for the Internal Research Grants Call** - it is moving through governance and will be announced when it opens.
5. **Look out for the follow-on proposal clinic** and the weekly grants-intelligence scan, which flags live opportunities matched to UMI's clusters.

Contacting the Research Grants Office

Dr. Dennis Aguma - Research Grants Lead

T: 0776 696500 / 0708 080008 E: daguma@umi.ac.ug

Ms. Yvonne Kembabazi - Research Grants Admin Assistant

T: 0782 927025 / 0705 757861 E: ykembabazi@umi.ac.ug