

ACADEMIC, PROFESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF (APAS)

WORKSHOP TRAINING MANUAL



PART 1

Introduction

The Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA)

The Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) is led jointly by the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), Kenya, and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa. Formed in 2008, this collaboration supports the development of a vibrant African academy able to lead world-class multidisciplinary research that impacts positively on public and population health. The consortium enhances the capacity of African universities to create sustainable multidisciplinary research hubs, by supporting junior faculty members to undertake their doctoral training locally, and to become internationally recognized research leaders. Ultimately, CARTA strengthens university-wide systems to support research, teaching, doctoral and postdoctoral training.

The APAS workshop

Annually, CARTA facilitates Academic, Professional and Administrative Staff (APAS) workshops as one way of strengthening the capacity of institutional functionaries. This training program aims to inspire participants to improve commitment in institutional systems and drive transformation to attain world-class research in African universities. CARTA recognizes the critical role that university managers and administrative staff play in research and doctoral training. Therefore, every year CARTA brings together finance officers, deans of graduate schools, academic deans, librarians, procurement officers, registrars, and many other officers to deliberate on and appreciate their complementary roles. We encourage other individuals who play a critical role in institutional processes, such as signing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the institution and other stakeholders, to participate in these workshops. Here, participants discuss how the different functionaries in the universities can be more responsive to, and supportive of, research, research training and doctoral and postdoctoral fellows in their respective institutions. More specifically, the workshops are designed to create a forum for faculty and administrative staff to discuss ways in which they can strengthen the training of doctoral and postdoctoral fellows and at the same time strengthen the capacity of the institutions.

The APAS workshops also aim to strengthen the rationale for African universities to develop strong research agendas. They demonstrate the positive linkages between good research and development in Africa. During the sessions, participants discuss the requirements for successful research in African universities, including the training of researchers according to global best practice. The workshops serve to reiterate, as important ingredients for the improvement of research outputs, the role of a supportive network of research administrators; the clear distinctions between the roles of different functionaries; the need for funding, especially by African governments; and the need for technology transfer to the continent.

Participants discuss knowledge management, defined as the process of creating and sharing information. They focus on topics such as gaps in repository policies in partner institutions, especially in open access journals, copyright issues, management of information, ethical use of social media (SM) as a platform capable of enhancing credible knowledge generation, and management in most African universities.

What the APAS curriculum offers

CARTA seeks to support African universities and research institutes to produce world-class knowledge, and internationally competitive doctoral graduates in Africa, by Africans and for Africa. The purpose of this workshop is to equip different functionaries, who play various roles in the universities and research institutions, to be more responsive to and supportive of research, research capacity strengthening, and early-career researchers (doctoral and postdoctoral).

Workshop learning outcomes

By the end of the APAS workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Define the roles of different functionaries necessary for the improvement of research outputs.
2. Communicate why research training is fundamental to the wellbeing of African societies.
3. Compare shared experiences, challenges and best practices in research across Africa.
4. Foster networks with people of similar interests, from whom to seek and share advice in future.
5. Identify their own strengths and develop areas for growth in supporting research, PhDs and postdocs.
6. Demonstrate understanding of the challenges limiting research productivity in Africa.
7. Develop a commitment to contributing towards improved research outputs.

Overall purpose: to equip different functionaries, who play various research roles in the universities and research institutions, to be more responsive to and supportive of research, PhDs, and post-docs.

In this workshop participants will	Understand different research roles in our institutions	Explore reasons for working in current institutions	Appreciate leadership capability in universities	Discuss why African universities must do world class research	Deepen understanding of institutional challenges	Explore challenges experienced by other institutions	Understand research governance	Explore how functionaries can advance an institutional research agenda	Develop personal commitment statements
Describe different research roles									
Communicate why research is fundamental to wellbeing of African societies									
Identify best research practices in Africa									
Develop research networks									
Identify areas for supporting research									
Understand research challenges									
Commit to improving research outputs									

Matrix: APAS workshop learning outcomes and content matrix

The participatory approach

While there are many approaches to training, our approach is problem-posing and participatory. Each session presents situations and poses problems. Participants work with each other and with inputs from the trainer to find solutions. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality (Freire, 2020). It is different from the transfer or transmission of knowledge or facts to the passive learner, where the trainer is seen as possessing all essential information, and trainees as “empty vessels” needing to be filled with knowledge. The choice of participatory method is deliberate: there is a coherence between the values we promote and the way we go about sharing them. From the beginning, we recognize all participants as thinking, creative people with the capacity for action. Each person is a contributor, bringing different perceptions based on their own experiences. As facilitator, a conscious effort to use participatory methods is required to genuinely enable people to grow in awareness, maturity and self-reliance, and not to control them. Any tool is only as good as the person using it and the use to which it is put.

Recommended attributes of facilitators

Some people assume that facilitating a workshop will be an easy process, until they try doing it. The participatory method adopted for the APAS workshop requires facilitators to do their best in guiding the workshop, appreciating that the participants are in charge. Facilitators are encouraged to recognize that their responsibility is to create an enabling environment that allows participants to learn from each other, come to an understanding and pool their collective wisdom in resolving issues. We recommend a range of attributes for those who aim to facilitate an APAS workshop.

An unbiased perspective

The best workshops are those where participants feel comfortable in knowing that their opinions are welcomed and encouraged. An unbiased facilitator creates a neutral zone where alternative points of view can be shared and debated in a respectful manner. This is key to driving a constructive, productive discussion.

There is nothing worse than a biased facilitator who steers the discussion to a pre-planned (and obvious) conclusion. This can happen if a person in a position of power tries to facilitate a discussion in which participants feel too uncomfortable to voice a different opinion from that of the leader. If the issue is sensitive, complex or heated, having an unbiased facilitator to lead the discussion may be the only way to avoid a futile workshop.

Sensitivity to the feelings of individuals

Creating and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and respect requires an awareness of how people are responding to both the topics under discussion and the opinions and reactions of others. Most people will not articulate their discomfort, hurt feelings, or even anger; instead, they silently withdraw from the discussion and often from the group. Sensing how people are feeling and understanding how to respond to a particular situation is a critical skill of facilitation.

Sensitivity to the feelings of the group

In any group, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and group “chemistry” generally reflects shared feelings: eagerness, restlessness, anger, boredom, enthusiasm, suspiciousness, or even silliness. Perceiving and responding to the group’s dynamic is essential to skilful facilitation.

Ability to listen

One way the facilitator learns to sense the feelings of individuals is by listening carefully, noting both the explicit meaning of words and their tone and implicit meaning. A good facilitator practices “active listening” whereby he or she may repeat, sum up or respond directly to what a speaker says to ensure the speaker’s meaning was correctly understood by the group. This is very important, especially if the speaker is unclear or the group becomes defensive.

Tact

Sometimes the facilitator must take actions that make people uncomfortable, or must say difficult things for the good of the group. The ability to do so carefully and diplomatically is critical. Examples include: a group discussion dominated by one person; or a group of silent participants. The facilitator must find a gentle, tactful way to engage the team so everyone can participate and get the most out of the session. Often, a participant asks a question, and then rambles on, eventually answering his own question. A capable facilitator knows how to diffuse these awkward moments and maintain a productive atmosphere.

Commitment to collaboration

Collaborative learning can occasionally seem frustrating and inefficient. At these moments, every facilitator feels tempted to take on the familiar role of the traditional teacher and to lead, rather than facilitate. However, genuine conviction about the empowering value of cooperative learning will help the facilitator resist a dominating role. Likewise, a good facilitator is willing to share facilitation with others in the group. The goal is always to conduct the best and most effective discussion. To that end, a good facilitator knows how to adjust his or her role accordingly.

A sense of timing

The facilitator needs to develop a “sixth sense” for time: when to bring a discussion to a close, when to change the topic, when to cut off someone who has talked too long, when to let the discussion run over the allotted time, and when to let the silence continue a little longer.

Resourcefulness and creativity

The facilitator must keep an open mind, as each group of participants presents different dynamics. Despite a well-planned agenda, discussions may not unfold as anticipated. A good facilitator should be able to think on his or her feet. This may mean changing direction in mid-stream, using other creative approaches to engage the group, or welcoming ideas from the group on how to shift the agenda. Good facilitators always have tricks up their sleeves that will help a group move forward while still keeping an eye on the overall objective of the meeting.

A sense of humour

As in most human endeavours, even the most serious, a sense of humour enhances the experience for everyone. A good facilitator appreciates life's ironies, is able to laugh at themselves and share the laughter of others.

In summary, a good facilitator works as an ally to ensure that meetings, seminars, planning sessions and workshops deliver the intended and desired outcomes. It is very difficult to facilitate a meeting yourself when you also want to participate in it as an equal. But not all facilitators are alike. Identify facilitators who have the personality and aptitude to understand the goals, objectives and expected outcomes of the curriculum.

Preparation

Participants

CARTA draws APAS workshop participants from selected universities and research centres. Participants include finance officers, deans of graduate schools, academic deans, librarians, communication/public relations officers, grant managers, procurement officers, registrars, research officers, those responsible for quality assurance, postgraduate supervisors, postgraduate program managers, ICT personnel and others. In general, all offices within the university or research institute that contribute towards research and postgraduate training are potential participants of the APAS workshops.

Two weeks before the workshop, send detailed information to participants on workshop logistics, the reason they were selected, the participatory workshop method and what is expected of them as participants.

In addition, share an online pre-workshop survey link to get the participants' profiles and to give them an opportunity to state their expectations and describe what they are willing to contribute to ensure the successful running of the workshop. The facilitators then analyze the information and adapt the workshop program, as much as possible, to accommodate the needs that participants have expressed.

Facilitation team

In plenty of time, identify and engage the co-facilitators and the different contributors for the APAS workshop. Hold planning meetings until the team members are on the same page.

To prepare, advise facilitators to read and re-read the curriculum until they feel comfortable and confident that they know what is expected for all the workshop sessions.

Venue

Identify a location that will allow participants to move around easily, for example for role-plays. Make sure there are enough break-away rooms for small-group activities, and adequate wall space for poster tours and other elements of the workshop methodology.