

SMARTLife Project: Research and Administration Managers Curriculum

Synopsis

This document outlines a draft curriculum for developing competency-based training modules for research administrators and managers. We illustrate the applicability of the proposed curriculum by using it for the development of two modules: an introductory module and a module on “Setting up and Running an Equitable International Collaboration”. The module on “Setting up and Running an Equitable International collaboration is based on a workshop conducted by the SMARTLife team.



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Introduction

Sustainable Management and Administration for Research: Training across the project Lifecycle (SMARTLife) project was collaboratively developed by a team research managers and administrators (RMAs) as part of a knowledge exchange programme. SMARTLife was supported by the funded/implemented by the AESA Research Management Programme in Africa (ReMPro) and ARMA United Kingdom (UK). Members from our team were from diverse backgrounds and hold a range of RMAs roles from the universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town and the African Institute of Biomedical Science and Technology representing Africa and the University of West of England and the GW4 Alliance – the Universities of Exeter, Bristol, Cardiff and Bath representing the United Kingdom.

A major need in the RMA field is professionalization of this field through academic institutes providing standardized competency-based training at scale. To this end, SMARTLife developed a curriculum or conceptual framework to help guide development of standardized and competency-based modules for RMA trainings. We present the first version of this conceptual framework which we plan to revise in the future. We also highlight the applicability of this framework.

Strategy for Curriculum Development

The overall curriculum development strategy was conducted in four broad steps and incorporation of the research life cycle summarized in Figure 1 and described below. Of note is that the pilot workshop and results from the scoping activities led to adjustments in the competencies and associated tasks.

Figure 1: Summary of steps taken to develop a draft curriculum.



- a) **Diverse SMARTLife Team:** The team working of this project is from a diverse range of backgrounds, RMA roles and from highly versus lowly resourced countries.
- b) **Competency development:** The team developed competence areas based on experiences, and literature. Results from Step C and D below used to further refine the competencies via a feedback loop.
- c) **Scoping tool and implementation:** A scoping tool was developed around the competency framework developed in Step B. 108 responses were obtained from RMAs and analysed. In brief, the results from this scoping exercise highlighted differences in years of employment, tasks RMAs were not confident/not confident in, challenges and enablers of equitable collaborations.
- d) **Pilot workshop/training:** A pilot workshop: *Setting up and Running an Equitable International Collaboration* was run with over 80 individuals in attendance.
- e) **Draft Curriculum for RMA training:** This is the first version of the curriculum, and it will be reviewed and revised in the future.

***Research life cycle:** RMAs work throughout the research life cycle or only at specific points. Therefore, it is key to include the research life cycle in a curriculum.

RMA Roles

While RMAs have diverse roles, we categorized them as RMAs-Hub and RMAs-Internal. We consider RMAs-Hub as those who provide support at hub or core offices and are not linked to a specific research project or principal investigator. RMAs-Internal are those who support research for a principal investigator for one specific project or several projects.

Table 1: Types of RMAs and their Core Roles.

	RMAs-Hub	RMAs-Internal
Core roles	Support of research from a central hub or levels such as departmental, faculty or overall organisation/universities. These roles can be aligned	Support of research activities at a project level.
Types of job titles	Faculty Finance Officer, Due Diligence Officer	Project Manager, Project Administrator

Competency Areas and Competencies

Ten competency areas were developed and used to identify common tasks for the RMA-Hub and RMA-Internal staff. The ten competency areas are described below and their associated common tasks outlined in Table 2.

Equitable partnerships: Sustainable research collaborations depend on, among other things, fair research partnerships, co-ownership, benefiting from capacity development, and their impact on improving social and academic outcomes. An equitable partnership is one where the interests and incentives of all partners receive fair recognition. As part of the project, the team evaluated several tasks that could be used to gauge equitable partnerships and these included looking at how trust within partnerships is built, facilitated, as well as sustained. In this section, the project investigated how partnering teams (i) navigate funding obligations taking into account differing local contexts, (ii) how the teams contribute to a fair working environment taking into account of cultural differences, (iii) promoting or supporting mutual learning, (iv) reporting or evaluations that takes into account differing needs of target audiences project beneficiaries, funders etc) in order to improve collaborations.

Financial Management: A key element that cements collaborations and partnerships in research is funding. In order to deliver on an idea, considerable amounts of funding are needed. Thus, financial management is fundamental to securing funding, managing projects, balancing budgets, handling operations, ensuring compliance and providing support in many other capacities. Additionally, international projects are often complex and involve operational challenges across the lifecycle of a project. Major tasks of consideration in financial management include the development of budgets; ensuring adherence to funders terms and conditions and procuring what is needed for the project as well as maintaining the staff that is working on the project. Monitoring of budgets through tracking expenditure, and forecasting is important. Finally, understanding the complex nature of financial transactions across borders is of critical importance. Lastly, in order to develop a system that is trusted, well-documented audit trails make reporting to funders easier.

Project management: Research managers and administrators may work exclusively on specific projects or provide support across a number of projects depending on their role. In some cases, roles may be a combination of both implementing research and research management. Critical tasks that informed questions asked in this area include preparation of bids between international partners; establishing project plans or policies; creating project management platforms; coordination and communication; achieving project deliverables; building or maintaining relationships with funders, partners or other stakeholders; collecting and collating data and project reporting to funders and other key stakeholders.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Designing and implementing monitoring plans for projects and using the gathered information and data to continually evaluate a project and adjust activities accordingly are key to the success of projects. Some key tasks include designing of M&E frameworks and indicators; conducting due diligence of partners or sub-awardees; collecting monitoring data; conducting data analyses; and writing evaluation reports.

Reporting and Communications: Communication and reporting are some of the most important considerations for successful partnerships. Communication covers aspects within teams, between teams, and across to funders and the general public. Formal and informal project reports to the funders and key-stakeholders are important for accountability, transparency and for dissemination of the project progress and results. Important tasks in this section include, designing and implementing

communication plans; engaging with the media; developing funder reports and all engagements with key stakeholders.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: Diversity can be an asset in collaborative teams or partnerships however, it mostly works when this diversity is tapped into, with equality in mind, thus enriching a project through merging of different perspectives. Important tasks in this section include how to design equality, diversity and inclusion plans for a project, ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion plans are implemented; training stakeholders about equality, diversity and inclusion.

Training and Capacity Development: Training and capacity building is an important aspect in any research if sustainability is considered. More so, for international research as it facilitates knowledge exchange and promotes longer term partnership development. The tasks in this specific area include supporting applicants in developing impactful research proposals, supporting the development and strengthening of partnerships to ensure research impact is realised at a local level; monitor ongoing impact and how it relates to the overall project goals; supporting further development of impacts whether that be through additional funding, dissemination, or reporting.

Innovation, Impact and Sustainability: Achieving impact and sustainable activities is at the core of international development research as it is crucial research makes a demonstrable contribution to society and the economy. Tasks include supporting the development, management and scale-up of innovations; supporting and maintaining collaborative partnerships to enhance project deliverables; support knowledge exchange activities and dissemination of project activities throughout the project lifecycle especially to policy makers and other key partners.

Ethical, Legal and Social Implications: International collaborative research can present a range of ethical, legal and social implication risks: to the people and communities involved, to the project partners, and to the integrity of the project itself. Research funders are increasingly expecting grant applicants to demonstrate that they have considered the risks, their responsibilities as a researcher, and how the management of these risks has fed into the research approach. In addition, there has been earlier research which has gone against the tenets of ethics and led to stigmatisation and apprehension of certain populations. Thus, as RMAs, it is important to ensure thorough ethics reviews prior to application submissions or projects starting; ensuring contracts are in place detailing all obligations; assisting researchers to demonstrate an awareness of the social and ethical implications of their research on the impact it might have on the society.

Research Systems, Policies and Infrastructure: Implementation of research projects depends on the creation of research environments that are conducive and supportive. RMAs are key to creating policies clearly defined systems, policies and infrastructure for research projects. This can include designing and implementing due diligence activities, designing and maintaining research contracts, maintaining information communication technologies, ensuring availability of research tools and laboratory services.

Table 2: Relevant Competencies

Competencies
Building trust within partnership
Facilitating shared goals, responsibilities and resources
Navigating funding obligations
Contributing to a fair working environment
Promoting or supporting mutual learning
Reporting or evaluation taking account differing needs of target audiences
Developing budgets
Ensuring adherence to funders terms and conditions
Procurement
Monitoring budget, tracking expenditure or cashflow forecasting
Processing financial claims or overseas/cross-border payments
Audit trails, reporting to funders and or management boards
Preparation of bids between international partners
Establishing project plans or policies
Project management platforms
coordination and communication
Achieving project deliverables
Building or maintaining relationships with funders, partners or other stakeholders
Collecting and Collating data
Designing of M&E frameworks and indicators
Conducting due diligence of partners or sub-awardees
Collecting monitoring data
Conducting data analyses
Writing evaluation reports
Designing communications plan
Implementing communications plans
Engaging with the media
Developing funder reports
Responsible for engaging with key stakeholders

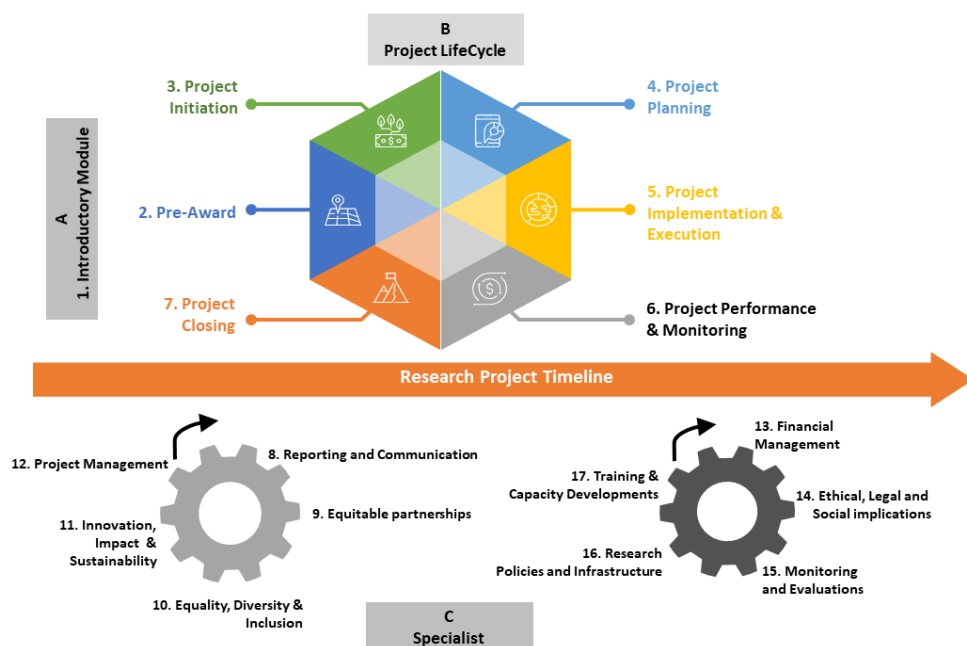
In subsequent curriculum versions, the competencies will be mapped,

Proposed Modules

We propose the modules highlighted in Figure 2 below. The content in the modules can be developed by the trainers from the competencies and be altered to suit the targeted learners' needs. As shown in Figure 2, the modules are categorized in three sections:

- a) **Introductory:** This a module or modules that can be used to highlight roles of RMA, history of the field and negotiating job tasks.
- b) **Project Life Cycle:** This is a cluster of modules that could take participants through the project life cycle depending on the target audience. This could also be a single module depending on the target participants. These modules will cover content from
- c) **Specialist Modules:** These are modules used that go into depth in specific areas.

Figure 2: Summary of possible modules *NB the project lifecycle could be separate modules or a single module depending on the target audience.



How to Apply the Curriculum for Creation of Modules

We suggest the proposed structure for developing specific modules.

Summary - This section aims to give participants an idea of what to expect from the course.

Competency Map - Competencies are extracted from the competency lists developed by SMARTLife and based on the target audience are tagged based on the required level by the audience. A single competency can be associated/linked with many outcomes. The competency levels which could guide learning outcomes and indicative content could be:

Learning Outcomes - Tangible, measurable knowledge, attitudes and skills the participants will gain from the course.

Indicative content – Key content to be covered in the course.

Pre-class reading – Real life examples of the impact, experiences or reports in the media that highlight experiences or job descriptions of RMAs. These can be short video clips etc.

Resources and templates – SMARTLife compiled a list of publicly available resources and templates that can be used by RMA trainers/educators. Templates and resources that can help participant implement the knowledge and skills they have acquired during the course.

Exercises – Participants to describe their current roles and the duties they do, highlighting what they expect to learn or contribute to the class by sharing their strengths and weakness to

Quiz questions – Multiple choice questions that can used to assess the

Example Module: Setting up and Building Equitable Partnerships

Summary: This module was developed for early career RMA-Hub and RMA-Internal. Equitable Partnerships are important for sharing ownership, strengthening capacity, sustainability, efficiency and improving social and academic outcomes. An equitable partnership is one where the interests and incentives of all partners receive fair recognition. Institutional capacity and support processes can affect whether research is done in a fair and efficient way. How confident are you in setting up and running equitable partnerships for international research projects? This module aims to provide an introduction for new research managers and administrators on how to set up equitable partnerships for international research projects.

Area: Competencies (levels)

- Building trust within partnership
- Facilitating shared goals, responsibilities and resources
- Navigating funding obligations
- Contributing to a fair working environment
- Promoting or supporting mutual learning
- Reporting or evaluation taking account differing needs of target audiences.

Learning Outcomes:

- List key steps required to set up an equitable international collaboration.
- Discuss challenges and enablers for setting up equitable international collaborations.
- Describe resources one could use to set up equitable international collaborations.

Indicative Content:

- Recognition: what voices are heard in project design, plan and implementation?
- Procedures: are they transparent and clear, representing everyone's voice?
- Distribution: how can resources, responsibilities and benefits be equitably distributed?
- Equitable partnerships in the context of research,
- Key principles and requirements of equitable partnerships
- Identify common funder requirements in relation to equitable partnerships.
- The role of research managers and administrators in supporting equitable project teams.

Case Study:

Dr Kumba is a finance manager who manages the transfer of sub-award funds from University X's faculty university office to 6 research partners in different countries. Unfortunately, transferring funds to 2 specific lowly resourced country takes a lot of time due to many tight regulations and policies that are in place. Unfortunately, this delays the rate and the number of deliverables these partners can meet and makes them look like they are under-achieving in comparison to the other 5. research partners that receive their sub-award funds timely.

Example Exercise: Imagine you are Dr Kumba, describe how you would address his predicament? (20 marks)

Quiz section: TBA

Pre-reading material: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/3/4/e000868>

Resources and Templates: See next page.

Source	Description	Link
Rethinking Research Collaborative (RRC) – An informal international network of academics, civil society organisations and social movements, international NGOs, and research support providers who are committed to working together to explore the politics of evidence and participation in knowledge for international development. The RRC aims to encourage more inclusive, responsive and transformative collaboration to improve the production of useful research for social justice and global development.	A useful resource of sector relevant articles	https://rethinkingresearchcollaborative.com/
	Consolidated list of existing resources compiled by Rethinking Research Collaborative	https://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/consolidation-of-existing-resources.pdf
	Research Report and Learning Resources: Promoting Fair and Equitable ydneyh Partnerships to Respond to Global Challenges	https://rethinkingresearchcollaborative.com/2018/10/04/research-report-promoting-fair-and-equitable-research-partnerships-to-respond-to-global-challenges/
Christian Aid – Research, Evidence and Learning: Working to strengthen research, evidence and learning across Christian Aid, and to critically engage with the development sector in support of effective, inclusive practitioner research.	Research, Evidence and Learning Team	https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/research
	Rethinking research partnerships: discussion guide and toolkit	https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/rethinking-research-partnerships
Development Studies Association (DSA) – The UK based membership organisation for all those studying, researching and teaching in the field of global development.	A report by the Development Studies Association October 2019. Towards More Equitable Interdisciplinary Development Research: Five Key Messages	https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/towards-more-equitable-interdisciplinary-development-research/attachments/towards-more-equitable-interdisciplinary-research.pdf
The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Impact Blog is a hub for researchers, administrative staff, librarians, students, think tanks, government, and anyone else interested in maximising the impact of academic work in the social sciences and other disciplines.	The NGO-Academia interface: obstacles to collaboration, lessons from systems thinking and suggested ways forward	https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/04/27/the-ngo-academia-interface-obstacles-to-collaboration-lessons-from-systems-thinking-and-suggested-ways-forward/
Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) – ESPA research, by its nature, cuts across many disciplines, including the social, natural and political sciences. There may be fundamental differences in ways of working, including in the use of language, methods, in evidence bases and in the communication of findings.	The Directorate has consulted with INNOGEN, part of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Genomics Network, and based at the University of Edinburgh. INNOGEN has produced a series of Short Guides to Interdisciplinary Research - ESPA Interdisciplinary Working	https://www.espa.ac.uk/grant-holders/interdisciplinary-working

University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Institute for Sustainable Futures – The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) is an interdisciplinary research and consulting organisation within the University of Technology Sydney.	How to Partner for Development Research: Effective approaches to collaboration and partnerships in international development research and evaluation	https://rdinetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/How-to-Partner-for-Development-Research_fv_Web.pdf
Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) – The Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) promotes research partnerships with institutions in developing and transition countries. It constitutes an alliance of Swiss institutions that engage in such research partnerships for the benefit of global cooperation and sustainable development.	11 Principles & 7 Questions: Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships	https://kfpe.scnat.ch/en/11_principles_7_questions
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) groups thirty-four Member countries committed to democratic government and the market economy. Governments can exchange and compare policy experiences, identify good practices and agree on decisions and action recommendations. The Organisation’s mission is to help governments and society reap the full benefits of globalisation, while tackling the economic, social, environmental and governance challenges that accompany it.	OECD Opportunities, Challenges and Good Practices in International Research Cooperation	http://www.oecd.org/sti/inno/47737209.pdf
Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research - A knowledge network promoting equity in health worldwide. A member-based, not-for-profit organization representing global health students, researchers and practitioners at institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across Canada and globally.	The Partnership Assessment Tool (PAT) was developed in response to observation that the majority of what has been written on best practices for “North- South” health research partnerships has been developed in the North. This seeks to elicit the Southern voice on health research partnerships and to generate substantive tools for significantly improving the way in which they are conducted	https://www.ccghr.ca/resources/partnerships-and-networking/partnership-assessment-tool/
INTRAC for Civil Society – A not-for-profit organisation that believes change starts with people, with citizens coming together to improve the world; building the skills and knowledge of civil society to be more effective in addressing poverty and inequality.	Academic-NGO Collaboration in International Development Research: A reflection on the issues	https://www.intrac.org/resources/academic-ngo-collaboration-international-development-research-reflection-issues/

Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED) – An international non-governmental organization whose primary objective is to strengthen research for health and innovation systems, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries.	Equitable Partnerships Contracts - Best Practice Tools on Global Health Research Contracting	www.cohred.org/FRC
Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) - An organisational learning tool that encourages governments, business, organisations, research / academic institutions and funders to describe how they take measures to create trusting, lasting, transparent and effective partnerships in research and innovation – and how they plan to improve their practices moving forward.	The RFI is a tool which aims to improve international research partnerships in all sectors by creating a global learning platform for fair and equitable research partnerships.	https://rfi.cohred.org/

