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ABSTRACT BOOK

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ORAL ABSTRACTS:

— Developing equity-oriented research support interventions using implementation science frameworks: Insights from the EquiPD project

Dr Zulfa Abrahams¹, Dr Rob Huddy¹, Ms Helen Hopkins², Ms Caryn McNamara³, Dr Yolande Harley¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, ²University College London, London, United Kingdom, ³University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Zulfa Abrahams is the Manager: Research Development in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town, where she leads a team responsible for strengthening research capacity, enhancing funding competitiveness, and supporting strategic research initiatives. Her role focuses on directing research development operations, improving support systems, and fostering cohesive, well-resourced environments for research excellence. She oversees the implementation of programmes that assist researchers with funding opportunities, proposal development, and research partnerships. Zulfa is committed to strengthening institutional processes, advancing effective research support, and contributing to a vibrant, inclusive, and globally engaged health sciences research ecosystem.

Equity in research funding is increasingly recognised as essential for fostering sustainable international collaboration. During collaborative proposal development involving institutions from the Global South and North, equity challenges frequently emerge that shape participation, decision making, resource distribution, and the long term viability of partnerships. The British Academy funded project “Addressing equity challenges during proposal development to enhance long term sustainability of institutions and their partnerships (EquiPD)” aimed to identify these challenges and co-develop practical interventions to address them through a structured, participatory process.

The project centered on a series of engagements with stakeholders from both regions. In an initial Theory of Change workshop, participants identified three priority equity challenges within their sphere of influence and generated potential interventions to mitigate their impact during proposal development. These draft interventions served as the foundation for a subsequent refinement process grounded in Implementation Science.

This presentation focuses on the methodological approach used to strengthen these interventions through two complementary Implementation Science frameworks. The Template for Intervention Description and Replication (TIDieR) was employed to systematically describe each intervention - its purpose, core elements, delivery mechanisms, target groups, and resource requirements. Using TIDieR ensured that each intervention was clearly articulated, feasible to interpret, and adaptable across diverse institutional contexts.

The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) was then applied to examine contextual factors influencing intervention uptake in Global South-Global North collaborations. This included identifying key stakeholders, organisational dynamics, structural barriers and enablers, and conditions necessary for long term sustainability.

Together, TIDieR and CFIR informed the development of a coherent, context sensitive set of interventions and supported the creation of clear implementation pathways. The presentation will outline methodological insights, demonstrate how these frameworks strengthened the intervention development process, and discuss practical implications for research offices seeking to embed equity considerations into proposal development support systems.

— Strategic approaches to enhancing institutional research outputs: The NUST initiatives

Prof Omotayo Rafiu Awofolu¹

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Prof Omotayo Awofolu is an academic and research manager at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, where he currently serves as the Director of Research and Postgraduate Development. He has supervised several masters and doctoral students to graduation and published widely with over 1,111 citations, reflecting significant contributions to the body of knowledge.

Research is one of the core businesses of universities, whose mandate, among other things, is to conduct research that drives national growth and development with a meaningful impact on society. As an emerging research-intensive institution, strengthening research productivity is both a strategic priority and a national development imperative for the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). With limited subsidy, the institution needs to develop strategies to achieve its research objectives. Despite notable progress in postgraduate enrolment and research activity, challenges such as limited grant acquisition, uneven publication rates across the years, and capacity constraints have hindered optimal performance. This study aimed to elucidate innovative and targeted institutional strategies towards enhanced research outputs, productivity, quality, and impact.

A mixed-methods case study research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through institutional research records, including publication outputs, grant income, and postgraduate throughput rates. Qualitative information on regional and international institutions was accessed through secondary data sources for comparative analysis.

The findings indicate that coordinated interventions such as structured research mentorship programmes, grant writing support, internal research chairs initiatives, strengthened postgraduate supervision frameworks, and enhanced international collaborations contribute to improved research outputs, grant application success and postgraduate throughput.

The study concludes that a holistic, systems-based approach that aligns institutional strategy, capacity enhancement programmes, internal competitive research initiatives, and collaborative networks is crucial for sustainable research growth. The NUST initiative demonstrates that context-responsive, strategically coordinated actions can significantly enhance institutional research outputs in emerging HEIs.

— Enabling research for impact: Institutional pathways for professional staff through the professional research group

Ms Amisha Benode¹, Prof Sarah Jane Johnston¹

¹UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Amisha is a dedicated leader in research support, serving as the driving force behind the Professional Research Group (PRG) at UNISA, where she champions research opportunities for professional and support staff. Qualified as an attorney with years of legal practice experience, Amisha brings a wealth of expertise in governance, strategic planning, and programme management.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Sarah Jane is a mathematician researching orthogonal polynomials and special functions. She joined the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2012 after studying at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Central Florida. She serves as Research Internationalisation Specialist in Research Support.

A comprehensive open distance learning institution with a national and global footprint is committed to advancing a high-impact research agenda that contributes to societal transformation, knowledge production, and innovation. In pursuit of this mandate, the institution is uniquely positioned as the only one among South Africa's 26 traditional universities and universities of technology to have established a Professional Research Group (PRG). PRG provides structured research support to permanent professional and support staff (non-academic staff), who are automatically members. In the South African higher education context, professional and support staff are generally not encouraged to undertake formal research, nor are they typically expected to attend conferences, produce accredited research outputs, or apply for National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings. PRG deliberately challenges this norm by fostering an inclusive and enabling research culture that creates opportunities for specialist, professional, and support staff engaged in formal research to participate meaningfully in the research enterprise. This presentation examines the impact of PRG as an institutional support mechanism, with a specific focus on its financial support for conference participation and its contribution to research capacity development. Using PRG as a case study, the paper presents evidence of impact through indicators such as postgraduate degree completion, accredited research outputs, conference participation, and successful NRF rating applications by PRG members. The presentation responds to the conference sub-theme by demonstrating how research managers can operationalise research impact through institutionalised support instruments. It showcases how targeted capacity-building initiatives, early-stage research support, and structured funding pathways enable professional and support staff in the administrative space to engage in sustained, meaningful research. Impact is conceptualised beyond conventional metrics to encompass research progress, skills development, and institutional culture change, offering a practical, transferable framework for research management practice.

—An integrated innovation management framework to strengthen industry-relevant research and intellectual property generation in universities

Mrs Yolande Bullock¹

¹North-West University, Potchefstroom,, South Africa

Biography:

Yolande Bullock is a senior higher education professional with over 20 years of experience in research administration, innovation support, and quality management. She serves as Senior Specialist: Quality and Office Operations within the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support Office at North-West University, where she oversees operational excellence, quality systems, post-award grant management, and compliance. Her expertise spans financial governance, stakeholder engagement, and managing complex multidisciplinary projects aligned with national funding and institutional policies. Yolande holds an MBA and has completed advanced training in innovation management, intellectual property, technology transfer, and ISO 9001 quality systems.

Universities play a pivotal role in national and regional innovation ecosystems, yet many struggle to translate strong research potential into sustained societal and economic impact. This presentation examines how institutional fragmentation across research development, industry engagement, intellectual property (IP) management, and technology transfer limits the effectiveness of innovation ecosystems within higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in developing- country contexts.

Drawing on an integrative review of international and African literature, the presentation will (i) map the university research-to-impact pathway across the full research lifecycle, (ii) highlight systemic disconnections between research support functions, technology transfer offices, and external innovation actors, and (iii) identify structural and managerial factors that constrain effective technology transfer and IP generation. Particular attention is given to misaligned incentives, siloed organisational practices, and weak coordination within institutional innovation ecosystems.

The core contribution of the presentation is the articulation of an integrated innovation-management framework that aligns research design, IP strategy, and industry engagement from early-stage research through to commercialisation and societal uptake. By reframing technology transfer as an ecosystem-level function rather than a downstream administrative activity, the presentation offers practical insights for strengthening institutional innovation pathways and improving impact outcomes.

The presentation contributes to the session by bridging theory and practice, offering a structured lens through which universities, policymakers, and innovation intermediaries can better connect research potential to real-world impact within complex innovation ecosystems.

— Researcher visibility as a researcher development strategy in increasing research impact

Ms Musa Buthelezi¹

¹University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Musa Buthelezi is a developing researcher and an administrator within the Research Department at the University of South Africa. In this role, she supports initiatives focused on researcher development and research career progression, helping to strengthen the capacity and productivity of researchers from early career to established academics within the institution. Musa is focused on fostering a culture of academic growth and excellence, facilitating programmes that enhance research skills, collaboration, and professional development for academic staff.

Research output serves a core metric in measuring research impact in institutions of higher education. The growth of research output is crucial for research impact, as it enables funding and collaboration in research communities within institutions of Higher education, and contributes to the academic progress of researchers, allowing heightened visibility for institutions of Higher education. Researchers' digital visibility is one of the effective tools to achieve greater research impact. The presentation will be on research managers and administrators in researcher development departments, and how they can assist with ensuring that researchers embrace the digital climate and obtain digital visibility through digital professional and research platforms, by including these skills as part of researcher development programmes.

The study aims to examine and measure how research output can have greater research impact through measuring researchers' profile visibility and research output activity on Google scholar, ORCID and LinkedIn. The study will adopt a quantitative research design that combines descriptive and bibliometric analyses to examine and measure research output impact.

Descriptive analysis will be used to summarise and compare the data, including the number researchers with profiles on the three platforms, and average of research outputs per South African public institution of Higher education. Bibliometric analysis will be used to identify and compare patterns of research impact between South African institutions of Higher education as identified by the three identified digital platforms. The study will use publicly available data from databases such as institutional websites, public repositories, DHET reports, Google Scholar, ORCID and LinkedIn.

The study will contribute to the growing discourse on researcher development by highlighting the potential of using various research digital platforms as a strategic tool for increasing research impact and a call to adapt and embrace current digital platforms that assist in accelerating research output and impact.

— No patent? No problem: Real-world impact pathways for SHAPE research

Dr Janine Chantson¹

¹North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Biography:

Janine is a registered technology transfer professional (RTTP) with extensive experience in IP management, innovation strategy, and building high-impact partnerships. She has a strong passion for capacity building, working to strengthen institutional capabilities and empower emerging innovators.

In 2022 she received the SARIMA award for outstanding contribution to the innovation management profession. In the following year, under her leadership, the NWU Technology Transfer and Innovation Support office was recognised with the SARIMA/DSI organisational achievement in innovation management award. Janine is the chair of the Course Review Committee for the Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals (ATTP).

Innovation ecosystems are often framed around laboratory science, patents, and spin-out technologies. Yet some of the most immediate and scalable societal impacts originate in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS). For technology transfer offices (TTOs), however, engaging HASS researchers can be challenging because their outputs do not always align with traditional intellectual property or commercialisation models.

This presentation explores how a university TTO can effectively engage HASS researchers and translate their work into real-world impact under the expanding SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) innovation agenda. It will outline practical strategies our TTO has developed to work with HASS faculty whose outputs often take non-traditional forms. These strategies include identifying and recognising diverse forms of intellectual assets (such as methodologies, digital content, policy tools, creative works, and training programmes); engaging researchers who may not typically interact with technology transfer structures; and building partnerships beyond conventional industry sectors.

Through selected case examples of SHAPE-related disclosures that progressed to commercialisation or structure impact pathways, the presentation illustrates how tailored support mechanisms, flexible licensing models, and impact-driven partnerships can unlock value from research that might otherwise be overlooked in technology-centric systems.

The session argues that integrating HASS more intentionally into innovation ecosystems not only broadens revenue and partnership opportunities, but also strengthens societal engagement and inclusive innovation. By rethinking how TTOs define, assess, and support “innovation,” universities can better move research potential to meaningful economic, cultural, and social impact.

— Positioning innovation for impact: Communication approaches within technology transfer ecosystems

Ms Anne Chisa¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Anne Chisa is a Technology Transfer Officer at Innovus, the Technology Transfer Office of Stellenbosch University, where she supports the protection, management, and commercialization of university-developed innovations. Her work focuses on evaluating research disclosures, developing intellectual property strategies, and facilitating partnerships between academia and industry to advance the translation of research into societal and economic impact. She also brings expertise in science communication, supporting the clear articulation of research value propositions to industry and broader stakeholders. Anne holds a PhD in Crop Science and a Master's degree in Agricultural Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Technology transfer ecosystems are designed to translate research outputs into societal and economic value, yet many institutional innovations struggle to gain traction beyond academic environments. While significant attention is placed on intellectual property protection, licensing, and commercialization pathways, less focus is given to how innovations are positioned and communicated to potential partners, investors, and broader stakeholders. This presentation argues that communication is a strategic enabler of technology transfer rather than a downstream promotional activity. Drawing on practice at the intersection of science communication, research engagement, and innovation visibility, this presentation explores how intentional communication approaches can strengthen innovation positioning across the technology transfer lifecycle. It highlights practical strategies for translating complex research into clear value propositions, aligning narratives with commercialization objectives, and enhancing the visibility of institutional innovation portfolios within competitive ecosystems. The presentation further reflects on challenges within African research environments, where strong innovation potential is often constrained by fragmented ecosystems, limited visibility, and gaps between researchers and external stakeholders. By integrating communication practices earlier in innovation processes, institutions can foster stronger partnerships, build stakeholder trust, and improve pathways from research potential to real-world impact. Participants will gain practical insights into embedding communication within technology transfer practice to support innovation uptake and ecosystem collaboration. Effective technology transfer requires not only robust IP and commercialization strategies but also deliberate communication frameworks that connect research, innovation, and opportunity. Positioning innovation strategically enables institutions to build more resilient, collaborative, and impact-driven innovation ecosystems.

— How the world can look different depending on your context

Dr Robin Drennan¹, Dr Karin Dyason¹

¹University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Robin Drennan has a PhD in chemistry. He has undertaken applied research in AECI and in CSIR. He worked for the NRF where he managed several programmes. In 2011 he joined Wits University as Director for Research Development. His role entailed leading, encouraging and supporting research. In 2025 he retired but continues to support researchers in South Africa to make a positive difference through research. In 2010 he won a Golden Quill award for research reporting; in 2017 a SARIMA award for distinguished contribution to Research Management, has Senior Research Manager recognition (2022) and is the chairman of IPRC (2026).

Professionalisation has been a rallying cry from SARIMA and other RIMAs in Africa for some time. The International Professional Recognition Council has worked tirelessly to share knowledge about the nine Key Competency Areas across three levels of operation that define the profession of research management and administration. It is the right strategic approach to build this profession we practising research managers cherish so much. The efforts made by many people are starting to show positive results – the number of practitioners with recognition is growing.

What then will trigger the next point of inflection in the S-curve? It must be awareness, but not necessarily amongst research managers.

There is still a widespread lack of awareness amongst academic leadership of the facilitating role that research managers can and do play. This is our next challenge. Not to convince practitioners of the value of professional recognition, but to convince HR managers, mid-level academic leaders and primarily senior academic leaders.

Why? Because the world looks different depending on your context. Your current location, be it physical or organisational, means that the view varies. The perceived pressures, the challenges that are confronted and the hurdles that are handled all shape what we see and experience. Too often have I heard from these leaders that administration is homogeneous. But, if we can inject into the psyche of these people the knowledge of the specialisation of research management and the value that this brings, then the demand for professional recognition will soar. This in turn will advance our profession.

— Reimagining medical device commercialisation through strategic distribution partnerships

Mr Zulfaqar Dudhia¹, Mr Gokul Nair²

¹Joseph Jacob, Cape Town, South Africa, ²Impulse Biomedical, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Zulfaqar Dudhia is a healthcare entrepreneur and commercialization specialist with experience in medical devices, regulatory strategy, and market access across emerging and international markets. He is involved with development and commercialization of healthcare technologies, focusing on bridging the gap between innovation and real-world clinical adoption. His work spans IP strategy, regulatory pathways, and distribution partnerships that enable medical technologies to reach healthcare providers and patients. Zulfaqar has experience working with technology transfer environments and industry partners to structure commercialization models that leverage sector expertise for market entry. His interests are finding gaps in patent landscaping, practical commercialization, and technology adoption

Effective intellectual property (IP) management must extend beyond protection to include practical pathways for translating innovation into societal and commercial impact. This case study examines the commercialization of a novel medical device developed within a South African innovation environment and the role of strategic distribution partnerships in enabling market entry.

While technology transfer frameworks often emphasise licensing or spin-out formation, these routes may be difficult to pursue in emerging innovation ecosystems where capital, regulatory expertise, and commercialization infrastructure are constrained. This case explores an alternative model in which a distribution partner—already active in the medical device sector—serves as a critical bridge between innovation and healthcare markets.

The distributor contributes sector-specific expertise, experience in introducing new medical devices to pharmacies and healthcare providers, and established relationships within the healthcare ecosystem. These capabilities significantly reduce barriers associated with product listing, regulatory navigation, and early-stage market adoption. Importantly, the commercialization model allows the originating company to retain ownership of its intellectual property while granting carefully structured marketing and distribution rights.

By examining the structuring of the distribution agreement and the operational collaboration between innovation developer and commercial partner, this case highlights how research and innovation managers can design pragmatic commercialization pathways that are resilient, scalable, and aligned with local market realities.

The lessons drawn from this case provide practical insights for technology transfer professionals seeking to translate research outputs into healthcare solutions while strengthening IP management and commercialization strategies in resource-constrained innovation environments.

This case ultimately asks a simple but critical question for innovation managers: what if the fastest path from protected IP to patient impact is not a spin-out, but a strategically structured distribution partnership?

—A modular airtable system to professionalize TTO workflows and measure KE impact

Dr Sally Makady¹, **Mr George Efram**¹

¹American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt

Biography:

Dr. Sally Makady is Senior Director of the American University in Cairo (AUC) Technology Transfer Office, leading the office's strategy, governance, and stakeholder engagement across research contracting, IP protection, and commercialisation. In this capacity, she provides executive oversight of portfolio governance and reporting, ensuring robust, consistent review processes and strong institutional visibility across IP, agreements, and commercialisation activity. She also led the operational requirements and adoption approach for Hermes, aligning the system with TTO governance needs and management reporting to support evidence-based decision-making in a lean, high-impact office.

Many technology transfer offices (TTOs) grow faster than their tools. Agreements end up in email, patents in spreadsheets, costs in invoices, and industry engagement in separate trackers—making it hard to maintain oversight, manage risk, and evidence IP and knowledge exchange impact. This presentation shares a practical solution developed at the American University in Cairo (AUC): Hermes, a modular Airtable-based TTO management system.

Hermes links the IP and commercialization workflow in one relational data model—covering organizations and contacts, invention disclosures, patent applications and prosecution stages, agreement review intake and outcomes, tasks and deadlines, budgets and costs, and customer discovery activity. Using role-based views and dashboards, the system reduces duplicated data entry, improves traceability from intake to outcome, and supports consistent processes across a lean team without heavy IT dependence.

We will walk through the system architecture, the minimum viable dataset needed to start, and how linked records enable practical workflows such as agreement review triage, patent prosecution tracking (deadlines and external counsel workload), and cost monitoring by category/vendor. Attendees will also see how dashboards convert day-to-day operational data into management-ready KPIs—for example, portfolio status by jurisdiction, turnaround time for agreement reviews, attorney workload, cost burn, and outreach funnel status—supporting governance and better resourcing decisions.

The session concludes with an implementation roadmap for small teams, including scoping, data migration, governance, and change management, to adopt the system incrementally and scale IP portfolio management and industry engagement over time.

— AI “Ghosts” humans: Machines and the shifting landscape of research integrity

Ms Eleni Flack-Davison¹, Dr. Taariq Surtee¹

¹Wits University Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Eleni Flack-Davison, admitted attorney, Head: Research Legal Compliance, Ethics and Integrity, and Data at Wits University. She is an inaugural Wits MIND institute fellow. She serves on the SARIMA Research Management Portfolio Committee and has co-founded and co-Chairs the SARIMA Northern Regions Research Ethics and Integrity CoP and the Steering Committee for the CoPs. Eleni was a special adviser to the 7th WCRI LOC. She is Deputy Chair for REASA. She was on the ASSAf drafting Committee for the POPIA Framework: Research. She is a co-recipient of the WCRI Anderson-Kleinert Diversity Award. Eleni is a Certified VIRT2UE Research Integrity Trainer.

This presentation explores how artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly “ghosts” humans in research and innovation processes, quietly performing tasks traditionally undertaken by researchers. As AI systems generate text, analyse data, and support decision-making, new questions arise around accountability, transparency, and authorship. The presentation examines how these developments challenge established norms of research integrity and concludes with recommendations for strengthening integrity frameworks to support responsible AI use.

The discussion adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, drawing on emerging policy statements, principles, checklists, and developing guidelines on AI in research and publishing. Through examples of AI-mediated authorship, generative text production, and algorithmic data analysis, the presentation highlights both opportunities and risks that AI introduces for research integrity.

A central concern is that unacknowledged AI use may create a form of digital “ghostwriting,” where human intellectual contribution becomes obscured and responsibility diffused. Beyond concerns about plagiarism or factual inaccuracies, AI systems may hallucinate information, fabricate data, or generate false references. Emerging research also suggests that advanced systems may present misleading competence, conceal limitations, or reinforce hidden algorithmic biases. These risks may undermine the reliability, reproducibility, and trustworthiness of research outcomes.

At the same time, AI offers important opportunities to strengthen research integrity. It can assist with reproducibility, support the detection of misconduct, and reduce certain forms of human error. However, the opacity of many machine learning systems complicates oversight. When AI-generated outputs contain errors or biases, tracing responsibility and ensuring accountability becomes difficult.

Safeguarding research integrity in the AI era requires a shift in approach: humans must remain ultimately accountable, while AI must be transparently acknowledged as a tool rather than an invisible substitute. Strengthening authorship rules, disclosure requirements, digital literacy, and responsible AI training will be essential to protect integrity in research and innovation.

— Spinout formation: What IP attorneys want TTOs to know

Mrs Mercia Fynn¹

¹Adams & Adams, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Mercia has extensive experience drafting and negotiating commercial agreement and IP transactional agreements. She deals with a broad range of IP transactions, including the licensing, distribution and sale of IP, material transfers, and contractual arrangements pertaining to IP research and development. Additionally, she advises clients with regards to company structures and strategies for protecting and generating revenue from IP, and assists with exchange control approvals in respect of cross-border transfers of IP. Mercia also has expertise in data privacy, electronic communications and transactions and consumer law, including assisting numerous businesses with their compliance in respect of these areas of law.

Successful spinout formation depends on investor-ready teams and clean, defensible intellectual property. This session explores the IP decisions that most often determine whether a spinout accelerates or stalls. We will begin by examining assignment timing, balancing the risks of assigning too early, which burdens an unfunded entity, against assigning too late, which delays deal closure.

We will compare option, license, and assignment structures, highlighting how field-of-use definitions, improvement clauses, and sublicensing rights shape long-term value and investor confidence. The discussion will address structuring economic terms, including equity ranges, royalties, milestone design, and when to bundle data, know-how, and materials with core patents to support commercial viability.

A critical focus is avoiding value leakage: drafting improvement rights with technical and field-based limits; ensuring sublicensing revenue shares and reporting obligations are robust; and retaining appropriate research and publication rights without undermining investor expectations. We also unpack the people-side risks that frequently derail diligence: securing student and employee IP assignments, resolving contributions from visitors or collaborators, and identifying conflicts arising from external consulting arrangements. Finally, we consider how to coordinate publication plans with priority filings and fundraising timelines to preserve novelty and support rapid diligence.

Across these themes, the session will provide practical guidance for universities and founders seeking to build an investor-ready IP position that withstands scrutiny, accelerates negotiations, and supports scalable growth.

Attendees will gain a consolidated framework for managing IP from pre-spinout incubation through to first financing, ensuring that the spinout's foundational assets are strategically structured and commercially compelling.

— The NUST innovation ecosystem as a blueprint for architecting strategic partnerships

Ms Valerie Garises¹

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Valerie Garises is the Director of Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). In this capacity, she stewards the university's technology transfer office, oversees incubation programmes, and leads strategic industry collaborations, all aimed at transforming academic research into market-ready solutions. Her work focuses on building the institutional architecture for co-creation, bridging the gap between researchers and external partners to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. With a strong commitment to advancing intellectual property strategy and commercialisation for societal benefit, Valerie actively engages in regional and international professional development and innovation ecosystem building.

In an era demanding demonstrable impact, the "Building Partnerships for Innovation" session calls for strategic, multi-actor collaboration. This presentation answers that call by detailing how the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) Innovation Ecosystem serves as a pioneering case study for operationalising the recently launched SADC "University-Industry Co-creation Standard Operating Procedures" (SOPs). It provides a tangible blueprint for moving beyond ad-hoc interactions to a structured, institution-wide system for partnership brokerage.

The NUST model was deliberately architected to address a critical challenge identified in the SOPs' foundational research: how to systematically connect academic research with the needs of industry, government, and civil society. Instead of a reactive Technology Transfer Office (TTO) model, NUST established a dedicated "Co-creation Unit" that functions as a strategic matchmaker. This unit proactively engages external stakeholders to map challenges and facilitates connections with researchers, effectively embedding the co-creation processes advocated in the SOP framework.

This presentation will unpack the core components of this successful model, directly mapping them to the SOPs' recommendations. We will detail how the unit's governance, guided by an ambidextrous "light hub structure," enables both central strategy and localised implementation, a key step in progressing along the SOPs' Capability Maturity Model (CMM). Finally, we will illustrate the multi-directional flow of value through concrete examples of partnerships.

The NUST case demonstrates that building resilient partnerships requires intentional architectural design, not just facilitation. It provides a replicable framework, grounded in the validated 10-2-5 model of the SADC SOPs, for research and innovation managers across Africa. By shifting from a reactive support role to a proactive partnership architecture, institutions can become indispensable nodes in their regional innovation ecosystems, ensuring research is translated into tangible societal and economic value. This presentation will offer delegates a practical roadmap to implement these strategies in their own contexts.

— EquiPD: A new toolkit to improve equity during collaborative proposal development to strengthen partnerships

Dr Yolande Harley¹, Dr Rob Huddy¹, Ms Helen Hopkins², Ms Caryn McNamara³, Ms Ella Sivyer², Dr Zulfa Abrahams¹
¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, ²University College London, London, United Kingdom, ³University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Yolande Harley is Director of Research of the University of Cape Town's (UCT's) Faculty of Health Sciences. Her role involves strategic advancement of research, development of partnerships, oversight of finances, and leadership of the Faculty Research Office. She oversees the portfolios of Research Intelligence (reporting, internal funding), Research Diligence (ethics, biosafety, regulatory) and Research Development (fund sourcing, visibility). She has served on local and international committees, and has presented internationally on funding and African research capacity development. Her work over the years has spanned the NGO sector, industry and academia within and outside of Africa.

Equity in research is a cornerstone of effective and sustainable collaboration. However, despite literature and guidance on the topic, practical solutions to improve equity have remained elusive. The EquiPD project aimed to identify equity challenges arising during international, collaborative research proposal development, and develop approaches to ameliorate their impact.

Supported by a British Academy grant (“Addressing equity challenges during proposal development to enhance long-term sustainability of institutions and their partnerships”), EquiPD was initiated by a collaborative research management team from the University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand, and University College London. Building on prior learnings, over a workshop series involving South-South-North partnerships, we used Theory-of-Change and Implementation-Science frameworks to: 1. Co-identify and describe three key equity challenges that arise during proposal development; 2. Distil and characterise interventions to tackle each equity challenge; and 3. Map a pathway for implementation of each intervention. Researchers and support professionals were consulted to calibrate thinking and refine outputs.

From this, we developed a toolkit. This includes a suite of practical templates that can be used by researchers and research managers to embed equity in collaborative proposal development. By completing the templates in three straightforward steps, aspects of equity in the funding call are identified upfront, partners are given the opportunity to articulate what they can contribute and what they need from the project, and appropriate roles and responsibilities can be agreed upon. The process increases transparency and agency, thereby enhancing equity as the collaboration is crafted, with envisaged positive impacts throughout the project.

This presentation will describe the EquiPD project and outline how the toolkit can be used to improve equity in collaborations. Research and Innovation Managers will benefit from a better understanding of equity issues during proposal development and how they can realistically influence this to strengthen partnerships and institutional resilience.

— Building partnerships for innovation: Lessons from Norway’s academic spin-off ecosystem

Mr Philip Hoekstra¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Philip is the IP Manager of the University of Cape Town, overseeing the IP Management Team in the Department of Research Contracts & Innovation (RC&I). He specialises in identifying, protecting, and commercialising university inventions in many disciplines. His past roles include Industry Analyst at Frost & Sullivan, IP Research Engineer at Optimal Energy, Candidate Patent Attorney at Von Seidels, and Process Engineer at Sans Fibres. Philip holds a chemical engineering degree from Stellenbosch University and is pursuing an M.Eng in Technology & Innovation Management at the University of Pretoria. He is also a Registered Technology Transfer Professional (RTTP).

Academic spin-off companies (ASOs) play an important role in translating publicly funded research into socio-economic value. The effectiveness of these ventures often depends on the strength of their relationships and partnerships within the broader innovation ecosystem, as well as on the quality of support from ecosystem participants.

As part of an ongoing qualitative, case study-based investigation examining the interactions and linkages between ASOs and their parent research institutions, the author is undertaking a three-month research visit to Norway during April–June, engaging with key actors across the Norwegian innovation ecosystem. Semi-structured interviews are being conducted with spin-off founders, technology transfer professionals, researchers, investors, funders, and representatives from parent research units. Parallel interviews are also being conducted with respondents in South Africa to enable comparative reflections between the two contexts.

Comparing Norway’s well-resourced innovation ecosystem with South Africa’s resource-constrained yet resilient context may reveal partnership models that support effective university spin-off collaboration across varied contexts. While the full empirical results of the research will be presented at a later stage, this presentation will share preliminary reflections and ecosystem-level observations emerging from engagements within the Norwegian innovation environment. Particular attention will be given to structural characteristics, partnership mechanisms, and practices that may offer relevant learning for the South African technology transfer community. In doing so, the presentation contributes to the SARIMA 2026 innovation management track theme of “Building Partnerships for Innovation” and aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 17, which emphasises partnerships as a catalyst for sustainable development and innovation.

— Strengthening equitable research collaborations: A case study from a Wellcome Trust Discovery award proposal

Mrs Helen Hopkins¹, **Dr Rob Huddy**², Ms Ella Sivyer¹, Ms Caryn McNamara³, Dr Zulfa Abrahams², Dr Yolande Harley²
¹University College London, London, United Kingdom, ²University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa, ³University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Helen Hopkins is a Senior Research Manager with more than 16 years' experience in research-intensive higher education facilitating global health and global research. She focuses on global initiatives involving partners in LMICs, specializing in coordinating and supporting the submission of strategic grant applications. Dr Hopkins is recognized for building strong networks and collaborations, both nationally and internationally.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Dr Rob Huddy (UCT) is an experienced researcher and proposal development specialist with considerable international and collaborative grant writing experience.

Equity in research is repeatedly identified in literature as foundational to effective and sustainable international collaboration. The proposal development stage offers a critical early leverage point, where embedding equity principles can meaningfully shape the design, power dynamics, and resource structures that ultimately define the fairness and success of the resulting project. Building on these insights, the EquiPD project team co-developed a practical toolkit designed to support research teams in establishing fair, transparent and values-aligned collaborative partnerships from the earliest stages of proposal development. The toolkit's structured resources, accompanied by guidance for their use, cover: 1) the funding call and proposed project overview, 2) co-applicant expertise and equity-relevant requirements, and 3) clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

This case study models the application of the EquiPD Toolkit by a collaborative team of hypothetical co-applicants based in Global South and North institutions as they develop a proposal in response to the Wellcome Trust Discovery Award scheme. By comparing proposal-development processes with and without the Toolkit, the study examines how structured equity-focused resources can shape early decision-making, team engagement and the negotiation of responsibilities, leadership and resource allocation.

This modelled case study aims to demonstrate that integrating a suite of equity-supporting tools into collaborative proposal development activities is a realistic approach that can make a meaningful impact on the resulting proposal and project. Beyond enabling clearer communication and stronger agreement on roles and expectations, the toolkit contributes to enhanced proposal coherence, improved research culture, and greater resilience of long-term partnerships. Ultimately, proposals developed with equity intentionally embedded from the outset are more likely to translate into fairer project implementation and strengthened research outcomes.

The EquiPD Toolkit provides guidance and a set of practical resources that research teams and research managers and administrators can use to effectively embed equitable practices in real-world grant development.

— Enabling research impact through strategic postdoctoral coordination

Ms Mandy Jampies¹

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Mandy Jampies is a research management professional at the University of the Free State (UFS), serving as Senior Officer in the Directorate: Research Development. She coordinates postdoctoral fellowship administration across the Bloemfontein and QwaQwa campuses, supporting fellows through funding applications, bursary processes, travel funding, and institutional reporting. With over 20 years of experience in higher education, including earlier work at the Central University of Technology, she has developed strong expertise in research support and funding management. Mandy is committed to strengthening research support systems and creating enabling environments that enhance research productivity and institutional capacity for research excellence.

As universities increasingly prioritise research that delivers measurable societal and academic impact, research and innovation management plays an important role in creating the institutional systems that enable researchers to succeed. Within this ecosystem, postdoctoral fellows represent a critical component of the research pipeline, contributing to research productivity, knowledge generation and the strengthening of collaborative networks. This paper presents an institutional case from the University of the Free State illustrating how strategic postdoctoral coordination can enable research impact through structured pathways, institutional partnerships and effective governance systems.

Situated within the Directorate: Research Development, the postdoctoral coordination function at UFS supports a diverse cohort of more than 150 postdoctoral fellows across faculties and research disciplines. The role extends beyond administrative management to the development of integrated processes that align fellowship administration with institutional research priorities, funding compliance, immigration processes and academic integration. These coordinated systems create an enabling environment that allows postdoctoral fellows to focus on research productivity and collaboration.

A key component of this model is strong stakeholder engagement across faculties, academic supervisors, Human Resources, Finance and international office. Effective collaboration between these stakeholders ensures that institutional processes are aligned and responsive to the needs of postdoctoral researchers; this engagement supports the productivity of postdoctoral fellows and strengthens their contributions to institutional research outputs and partnerships. An important institutional development supporting this framework has been the review and restructuring of the UFS postdoctoral policy, including the separation of policy and procedures to enhance governance clarity and operational efficiency.

Framed within the sub-theme Enabling Research for Impact – Pathways, Partnerships, and Measuring What Matters, the paper highlights how coordinated research management practices can support measurable research impact. The case demonstrates that strengthening institutional systems, partnerships, and governance structures is essential to enabling postdoctoral researchers to contribute meaningfully to research impact and capacity development within the Global South.

— Building resilient and inclusive research funding systems: Reimagining external grants management for institutional impact

Prof Sarah Jane Johnston¹

¹UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

I am a mathematician with research interests in Orthogonal Polynomials and Special Functions. I joined the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2012 after studying and working at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and the University of Central Florida, USA. I was the Chair of the Department of Mathematical Sciences at UNISA from 2014 to 2018 and thereafter was the Head of Research and Graduate Studies for the College of Science, Engineering and Technology at UNISA from 2018 to 2025. I am now a Research Internationalisation Specialist in the Department of Research Support in Research, Innovation and Commercialisation.

Universities operating in complex, resource-constrained and rapidly changing research environments require resilient research and innovation management systems that enable impact, accountability and inclusive participation in external funding opportunities. This presentation examines how a comprehensive open distance learning university with a national and global footprint, has reimagined its external grants management approach to strengthen institutional resilience while advancing impact and inclusion.

The presentation, focusing on reflective document analysis, will outline the development and implementation of an integrated External Research Grants Management Framework, supported by a Standard Operating Procedure for grant applications. Together, these tools provide a coherent, lifecycle-based approach to external funding, spanning strategic opportunity identification, proposal development, institutional vetting, post-award governance, financial stewardship, risk management, and performance reporting. Particular attention will be given to how the framework clarifies roles and responsibilities, embeds good financial grant practice, and aligns researcher support with institutional and national research priorities.

The presentation contributes to the conference theme by demonstrating how intentional research management design can enhance organisational resilience through standardisation, compliance, and audit readiness, while simultaneously promoting inclusion by lowering administrative barriers, strengthening researcher capacity, and broadening access to funding opportunities for emerging and historically underrepresented researchers. The use of structured risk registers, monitoring dashboards, and continuous improvement mechanisms will be discussed as practical tools for navigating uncertainty and safeguarding institutional credibility.

For SARIMA practitioners, research managers, and research leaders, this presentation offers a transferable case study of how policy-driven yet enabling research support structures can be implemented without constraining academic creativity. The session will provide concrete lessons, tools and reflections relevant to institutions seeking to professionalise research funding support, strengthen third-stream income generation, and reimagine research and innovation management for sustainable, inclusive impact.

— More than time and travel: Rethinking participant compensation in qualitative health research

Ms Charmaine Khumalo¹, Mr Siyanda Mangele²

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Biography:

Charmaine Khumalo serves as the Head of the Health Research Ethics Office at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. With over 7 years of experience in research ethics and integrity, she is a recognized expert in the field, accredited as a Research Management Professional (RMP) by the International Recognition Council. Additionally, she is a certified Research Integrity Trainer through the Embassy of Good Science. Charmaine earned her undergraduate degree in Microbiology and Genetics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and holds an MSc in Bioethics and Health Law from Wits University. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD in Health Research Ethics.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Siyanda is currently a Manager - Research Ethics at the University of Zululand. He has over 12 years of experience in research management & administration in the institutions of Higher Education, having worked at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) dealing with research outputs/publications and Rhodes University (RU) focusing in research ethics management, coordination and administration for both HREC & AREC.

Health Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in South Africa are increasingly reviewing studies that utilise qualitative and social science methodologies within health research. Participant compensation in these studies presents an ongoing ethical challenge. Current national guidance largely relies on the Time, Inconvenience and Expenses (TIE) model derived from clinical trial frameworks. According to Good Clinical Practice and the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) guidelines, participants in clinical trials should be reimbursed for time, inconvenience and expenses. However, these frameworks were designed primarily for biomedical research and do not fully address the realities of qualitative or community-based studies.

The National Department of Health's Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures (3rd edition, 2024) continues to draw on the TIE model, leaving uncertainty regarding appropriate compensation for participants in non-clinical and qualitative research. In practice, this has led to inconsistent approaches across studies, including the use of lotteries or prize-based incentives. Such practices raise concerns regarding fairness, equity, and potential undue influence, particularly when engaging participants from historically marginalised communities.

This paper critically examines the applicability of the TIE model to qualitative health research in the South African context. It explores how current compensation practices may affect equity, inclusion and the ethical participation of research communities. Drawing on REC review experiences and national ethical guidance, the paper argues that existing frameworks inadequately address compensation in qualitative and social science research. The paper further highlights the need for expanded ethical guidance and increased representation of social science expertise within health RECs to support contextually appropriate and equitable approaches to participant compensation.

— Visibility, voice, and value: Connecting people with purpose

Ms Zamakayise Kose¹

¹North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

Biography:

Zamakayise Kose is a Senior Manager at North-West University (NWU), leading the Research Quality Programme within the Directorate of Research and Postgraduate Support. She drives initiatives to strengthen research quality and performance. A recognised Research Management Professional (RMP) by the IPRC, she has over a decade of experience in research coordination and management. Previously, she spent eight years at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), coordinating multi-partner international projects. She holds a Master's in Research Psychology, co-authored peer-reviewed publications, and has presented at the 2020, 2024, and 2025 SARIMA Conferences. She is passionate about advancing research excellence, integrity, and impact.

Institutional research and innovation portfolios are strengthened not only by academic excellence, but by the systems and professionals that enable them. Yet within some South African universities, a divide between central research offices and faculty-based staff limits coherence, coordination, and the visibility of the research and innovation portfolio. Fragmented structures often obscure the strategic contribution of Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs), weakening the institution's ability to present a unified research identity.

This study will explore how bridging structural and relational divides enhances visibility across the institutional research and innovation portfolio. Drawing on qualitative interviews with staff from research offices and faculties, the research examines how collaboration, knowledge sharing, and participation in institutional capacity-building programmes influence alignment, communication, and strategic positioning of research activities.

Findings will suggest that visibility is not merely a communications function, but a product of integrated practice. Inclusive collaboration enables clearer articulation of research strengths, improved coordination of funding and reporting processes, and stronger alignment between faculty initiatives and institutional strategy. As RMAs engage across boundaries, they contribute to shaping narratives around research performance, innovation impact, and institutional priorities. In doing so, they move from behind-the-scenes support roles to active contributors in the research and innovation portfolio.

The research will highlight practical strategies for enhancing portfolio visibility, including shared data systems, mentorship and peer-learning networks, and targeted professional development initiatives that embed collaboration into everyday practice.

By reframing collaboration as a mechanism for strategic alignment and shared storytelling, this study offers practical lessons for building bridges between people, structures, and priorities ensuring that the institutional research and innovation portfolio is not only strong but resilient, future-ready, and sustainably supported within an evolving higher education landscape.

— Strengthening IP management and commercialisation strategies

Mr Njabulo Kubheka¹

¹University of the Western Cape (UWC) Technology Transfer Office, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Mr Njabulo Makhunga Kubheka is a Technology Transfer Officer at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Technology Transfer Office. Prior to joining UWC he was admitted to an internship programme under the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO)'s Regulatory and Compliance unit, a specialist service delivery unit within the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). His academic background includes obtaining a BCom (Law and Economics) degree with the University of South Africa (UNISA). His area of expertise includes providing support in terms of maintaining UWC Technology Transfer Office IP portfolio, NIPMO reporting, Seed Fund Management and Bioprospecting Portfolio.

Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) play a critical role in translating publicly funded research into socio-economic impact through effective intellectual property (IP) management and commercialisation. In South Africa, this mandate is supported by a national framework led by the National Intellectual Property Management Office (NIPMO) under the Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development Act (IPR-Act). Despite this enabling environment, many institutions continue to face challenges in building strong IP pipelines, securing industry partnerships, and advancing technologies beyond early development stages.

This presentation explores how strengthened IP management and commercialization strategies can support the responsible development of innovations derived from Indigenous Biological Resources (IBRs). Using two comparative case studies from the agricultural and cosmetics sectors, the presentation highlights how differences in IP management practices, stakeholder coordination, regulatory compliance, and inventor participation can significantly influence commercialization outcomes.

The agricultural case demonstrates how early disclosure, coordinated IP protection strategies, and proactive inventor engagement enabled effective alignment between bioprospecting compliance and commercialization objectives, ultimately supporting the successful progression of the technology toward market readiness and potential industry uptake. In contrast, the cosmetics case illustrates challenges arising from publications before disclosures, fragmented stakeholder engagement, and complexities related to inventor engagement, which collectively hindered advancement while the technology is progressing rapidly. Its just not smooth sailing and of course we taking much bigger risks compared to the agri-process.

Through these comparative insights, the presentation identifies practical strategies that the Technology Transfer Office can adopt to strengthen IP governance, improve coordination of bioprospecting compliance processes, and foster stronger inventor participation. These lessons contribute to ongoing efforts to enhance the effectiveness of institutional IP management systems and support the sustainable commercialization of biodiversity-based innovations.

— Strengthening integrity through external review and PAM

Ms Olivia Langenhoven¹, Ms Hlonela Gogweni¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Olivia T.M. Langenhoven is the Manager of Ethics and Compliance at the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Health Sciences. In this role, she coordinates research ethics administration and ensures compliance with ethical and regulatory standards for the Animal Ethics and Biosafety Committees. Olivia holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Ethics and a BTech in Town & Regional Planning, and she is currently completing a Master's in Philosophy (Biomedical Applied Ethics

While most research offices excel at administrative protocol review, a critical knowledge gap exists in ensuring that approved ethical standards are actually mirrored in laboratory practice. This poster addresses the institutional "blind spot" created by relying solely on paper-based compliance. Proposing a transition to active stewardship, this work is informed by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Faculty of Health Sciences Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC) following its first independent external review in March 2025.

The audit brought to light the necessity of Post-Approval Monitoring (PAM) conducted by multi-stakeholder teams (Categories A-D). Findings from pilot inspections in July 2025 revealed significant "protocol drift"—cases where researchers modified analgesia administration without prior approval and instances where postgraduate students were found working in high-containment labs without assigned Principal Investigator (PI) supervision following staff departures. Furthermore, this work addresses the unseen logistical and financial hurdles of active monitoring. Data from BSL-2 and BSL-3 facility inspections highlight the "real-world" costs of integrity, including mandatory tuberculosis (TB) screening for monitors and the high expense of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). These findings challenge the SARIMA community to reimagine the Ethics & Compliance Manager not as an administrator, but as a strategic field-monitor who ensures transparency across the research lifecycle.

Value to the SARIMA Community: Attendees will gain a practical framework for implementing PAM that moves beyond "policing" to an educative engagement model. By sharing data on logistical costs and common non-compliance trends, this presentation offers a roadmap for African institutions to strengthen their research ecosystems against reputational and ethical risks during periods of regulatory change

— Navigating research ethics governance: Moving beyond compliance to building trust

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¹North-West University, South Africa, ²Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), India

Biography:

Siyanda is a seasoned research management professional with over 15 years' experience in higher education. He is currently the Manager of Research Ethics and Integrity at the UNIZULU, where he oversees HREC and AREC operations, ensuring regulatory compliance and addressing research misconduct. His expertise includes research ethics management, policy development & research outputs review. He is the Chair of the Eastern Region CoP for Research Ethics & Integrity. He is also the Co-Chair of the Research Outputs, Outcome & Impact, COP for SARIMA. He serves as an editor of the Journal of Research Management & Administration hosted by Coventry University

Research ethics governance is a central function of Research Management and Administration within universities and supporting responsible research conduct and institutional accountability. While institutional ethics clearance processes are designed to safeguard responsible research conduct, they are often experienced by researchers primarily as administrative compliance requirements. This perception can create tensions between researchers and research management structures responsible for implementing ethical oversight. Drawing on a qualitative case study conducted as part of a master's thesis, the paper examines how researchers experience institutional ethics clearance processes and the role of research managers in shaping those experiences. Semi-structured interviews with academic researchers explored perceptions of the ethics review process, interactions with research ethics administrators, the extent to which current practices foster trust, transparency, and meaningful engagement with research ethics. The findings highlight a recurring theme of trust and mistrust within ethics governance processes. Some researchers perceived ethics procedures as being underpinned by an implicit mistrust of researchers, reflected in highly procedural and stringent compliance requirements. At the same time, institutional policies often assume the need for strong oversight mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct. This dynamic can result in misaligned expectations between researchers and research managers. The paper argues that research managers play a critical role not only in administering compliance processes but also in cultivating an institutional culture of ethical responsibility. Strengthening communication, transparency, and mutual understanding between researchers and ethics administrators can help reposition ethics processes as supportive governance mechanisms rather than administrative hurdles. These insights are particularly relevant for research management professionals working in evolving research ecosystems across Africa. The study highlights the importance of balancing compliance with relationship-building and ethical stewardship. The presentation will invite participants to reflect on how research management practices can contribute to building trust, improving researcher engagement, and strengthening institutional ethics governance within evolving research environments.

— Building lifelong partnerships: Financial sustainability strategies in six selected social innovation projects

Dr Thembinkosi Maphosa¹, Mrs Aisha Mahomed Ali¹, Dr Ana Casanueva-Gonzalez¹, Prof Abdullah Bayat¹

¹University of the Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Maphosa Thembinkosi is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of the Western Cape Technology Transfer Office. Amongst other responsibilities, his interest is in finding out how to implement socio-financial sustainable strategies for social innovation projects, mostly in economically challenged communities.

The socio-financial sustainability challenges faced by social innovation projects in low-income communities have prompted a renewed focus on research initiatives within Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) worldwide. This study addresses a critical gap: while these communities exhibit high demand for innovative solutions, their low-income levels hinder the financial sustainability required to sustain transformative projects. Without adequate support, the potential for positive change in the lives of community members remains unrealised.

Our ethically approved qualitative research involved six social innovation projects led by four TTOs from various higher education institutions in South Africa. Through in-depth analysis, we uncovered essential factors that contribute to the socio-financial sustainability of these initiatives, including the strategic use of social media, diverse funding sources, community engagement, and the necessity of conducting thorough feasibility studies.

Key findings suggest that for social innovations to achieve meaningful socio-financial impact, it is crucial to engage potential beneficiaries in initial feasibility studies. Discussions should encompass payment mechanisms, anticipated service or product uptake, community leadership involvement, effective social media strategies, potential funding sources, payment gateways, benefit-sharing models, and formal agreements.

We recommend that these discussions occur continuously: before, during, and after project implementation to effectively mitigate socio-financial sustainability challenges and enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes for low-income communities.

— Beyond licensing revenue: Impact-driven and social innovation commercialisation in publicly funded research institutions

Dr Bruce Maseko¹

¹University of Cape Town, Mowbray, Cape Town, 7705, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Bruce Maseko is Senior Manager: Innovation at Research Contracts and Innovation (RC&I), bringing over 15 years of experience in technology commercialisation across academic and industry environments. His expertise spans the development and implementation of commercialisation strategies, management of innovation projects, market research and techno-economic evaluations, stakeholder engagement, fundraising, intellectual property management, and business planning.

Passionate about bridging the gap between research and market application, Bruce is committed to advancing impact-driven innovation and fostering growth through RC&I's mandate. His work reflects a strong dedication to translating research outputs into solutions that deliver both commercial value and societal benefit

Traditional university technology transfer systems face challenges due to misalignment. Currently, success is measured primarily by revenue-related indicators, like patent counts and licensing fees, based on benchmarks from the Global North. In South Africa, this "one-size-fits-all" approach creates a barrier that discourages research aimed at tackling poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This paper argues that the current technology transfer paradigm often overlooks socially responsive innovation, falling short of delivering the public benefit required by the Intellectual Property Rights Act of 2008. It also ignores the urgent need for socio-economic change and the decolonisation of innovation systems.

This study uses a multi-case qualitative design, combining information from key South African innovation hubs, such as UCT's Bertha Centre and SARAO, with a literature-based theoretical synthesis. The research evaluates existing technology transfer pipelines through the lens of Social Return on Investment and the Quadruple Helix model, pinpointing areas where current institutional frameworks do not support non-traditional commercialisation paths.

The paper builds its arguments on the "Third Mission" theory and Mission-Oriented Innovation. It specifically addresses the decolonial turn in innovation, challenging the Eurocentric linear model of technology transfer in favour of Inclusive Innovation. By viewing technology transfer as a tool for decolonisation, the paper explores how indigenous knowledge and socially engaged research can be seen as valuable outputs of innovation.

This paper proposes a Strategic Impact-Oriented Framework that redefines Technology Transfer Offices as impact enablers rather than just IP brokers. It provides a practical roadmap for innovation managers in emerging economies, guiding them to balance legal compliance with the moral and strategic need for real societal change.

— Dismantle to assemble: Leveraging funding mechanisms for impact, inclusion and innovation

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Biography:

Mpho Mashamba is a research development professional at the University of the Free State (UFS). He holds a Master of Laws, an Honors degree in Criminology and a BSocSc degree specializing in Psychology, Industrial Psychology, Sociology and Criminology from UFS. With an interest in digitization within Higher Education, His focus is on integrating research systems, improving grant application processes, and developing governance processes to improve the visibility of research support offices. With experience from various industries (Agriculture and Education), he aims to strengthen research ecosystems, advance equity, and position research development as a key driver of institutional research impact.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Zusake Sokutu is a research support officer at the University of the Free State. Her role supports compliance and funding processes including stakeholder engagement, supporting and managing central research funding, and organizing ethics related processes, enabling research and operational efficiency. She has also acted in a finance capacity where she was responsible for budget reviews, project reconciliation, financial reporting and analysis, and reviewing & processing payments. Exposure to financial oversight has provided her with a practical insight into institutional research management. With hands on experience and continued growth, she aims to strengthen her contribution to research and administrative spaces.

Universities across Africa, and indeed South Africa, are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate significant research impact. Given the colonial and discriminative historical background of most of these universities, they must demonstrate significant research impact while navigating systemic differentials that range from racial bias to gender disparities in access to various resources; such as research funding.

These systemic issues hinder progression opportunities for previously disadvantaged researchers, particularly black female researchers. Nkosi and Maphalala (2024) argue that “Gender equity in research in higher education is crucial for promoting inclusivity and driving innovation.” Research Support Offices (RSOs) therefore have a responsibility to design and implement institutional systems that not only allocate funding but intentionally enable researcher development and measure research impact. This paper documents the design and implementation of a targeted funding and support model (Central Research Fund – CRF) for black female researchers at the University of the Free State.

Institutional data collected over two funding cycles, 2024 and 2025 academic years, was used to evaluate effectiveness, including application and success rates and researcher participation in capacity-building activities. Comparative analysis with previous funding cycles indicates increased participation of female researchers in internal funding calls, improved proposal completeness at submission, and the proportion of projects supported through internal funding (34 in 2024 & 105 in 2025, a 69% increase).

To address the “measuring what matters” imperative, CRF introduces expanded indicators beyond traditional outputs (such as journal articles), including researcher progression, postgraduate delivery, and collaborative partnerships formed. These indicators provide a more nuanced understanding of impact at both researcher and institutional levels.

This paper thus offers transferable lessons for research support offices looking to leverage institutional funding as an enabling tool for inclusivity and innovation, particularly in a resource-constrained higher education environment.

— Invisible work, visible impact: Leveraging digitisation for maximum impact

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Biography:

Mpho Mashamba is a research development professional at the University of the Free State (UFS). He holds a Master of Laws, an Honors degree in Criminology and a BSocSc degree specialising in Psychology, Industrial Psychology, Sociology and Criminology from UFS. With an interest in digitisation within Higher Education, His focus is on integrating research systems, improving grant application processes, and developing governance processes to improve the visibility of research support offices. With experience from various industries (Agriculture and Education), he aims to strengthen research ecosystems, advance equity, and position research development as a key driver of institutional research impact

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Muneera Mansoor is the Office Manager for the Directorate: Research Development at the University of the Free State, where she has served since 2018. She previously spent 16 years in the banking sector, building extensive experience in financial services and client relations. During this time, she completed courses in Event and Conference Management, Marketing & Marketing Management through Damelin, as well as the Wealth Management Programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (NQF6). Muneera is FAIS compliant and has completed Essential Sales Skills training with Consultant Powerhouse. In 2025, she earned professional membership through the OPSA Professional Designation Masterclass.

The University of the Free States' Directorate for Research Development (DRD) is responsible for crucial yet often unseen work or services. These include supporting grant and funding applications, internal funding services, ethics and compliance services, training workshops, and building research capacity. Without meaningful visibility and accessibility, these services are at risk of being underutilised.

In a digital age where society consumes information via social media and #hashtags, visibility and access should not be an obstacle. For instance, 90% of new visitors on the DRD webpage directly resulted from links posted on LinkedIn. However, sharing links on platforms such as LinkedIn is not enough – this will get the user to the webpage, but content and aesthetics matter! Rather than a unused information relic, this paper intends to position the UFS Research Development webpage (<https://www.ufs.ac.za/research/research>) as a strategic engagement platform and powerful tool for impact.

Using website impressions, website analytics, and service uptake data, the paper intends to exhibit how targeted content revamp and clearer engagement pathways can lead to impactful outcomes. For instance, after significant updates to DRD webpage, new visitors increased by 1.88% (55.48% in 2024 to 57.36% in 2025), with 59% (about 60 041) of users remaining on the webpage and exploring further links within the webpage. The increase in visits has resulted in an increase in uptake of internal funding tools such as CRF by 43.8% (170 applications to 388).

By reimagining the DRD webpage as a dynamic engagement hub, the UFS has successfully turned "behind-the-scenes" administrative work into visible, measurable results. When digitisation is purposeful—meaning it's built on analytics, tied to university goals, and focused on the user—it drives research growth and boosts the institution's reputation. For other research offices, this serves as a practical, scalable blueprint for using digital tools to amplify their impact.

—What does equity look like during the development of research collaboration proposals?

Ms Caz McNamara¹, Mrs Helen Hopkins, Ms Ella Sivyver, Dr Rob Huddy, Dr Zulfa Abrahams, Dr Yolande Harley

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Biography:

Caz has a Masters in Biochemistry (Rhodes University, 2006) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Research Management and Administration (Stellenbosch University, 2023). She has worked in Research Management for 18 years, currently at Wits University. She holds Senior Research Management Professional (SRMP) accreditation through the International Professional Recognition Council (IPRC; <https://iprcouncil.com/>) and is the previous Vice-President for Research Management at the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA). She is a member of EARMA. She worked closely with WARIMA as the Project Lead on the capacity development theme of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SCGI) in Africa.

Many challenges can arise at any stage of research collaborations. The EquipD Project Team were particularly interested in identifying challenges relating to equity, in order to develop a toolkit of resources that could be used to address these challenges.

"Equity in research is the intentional, fair, and just allocation of resources, opportunities, and methodologies to ensure that all individuals and groups—particularly those historically marginalized—can participate in and benefit from research. It moves beyond "equality" (treating everyone the same) to "equity" (providing tailored support based on need) to achieve equal, valid, and applicable outcomes for all" - Association of Medical Research Charities, UK.

We co-identified the key challenges by interrogating three key datasets, including: the British Academy Equitable Partnerships Workshop Series outputs data, a literature review of publications on equitable partnerships, and the results of an survey of research and Research Management and Administration (RMA) experts from three Global North and Global South (GN/GS) institutions; to determine recurring challenges in research collaborations and those linked specifically to equity.

This presentation will look at the above-mentioned datasets and outline: (i) what the key/recurring challenges in research collaborations were, (ii) which ones related specifically to equity, and (iii) which ones RMAs held within their field of influence to effect actual change should interventions be suggested. Overall this presentation will give the audience insights into equity at the proposal development (pre-award) stage and how RMAs can be best positioned to assist with ensuring equity.

— Building data readiness for digital transformation in research management

Ms Boitumelo Mdluli¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Boitumelo Mdluli is an experienced research support professional with over five years' expertise in helping researchers prepare and plan competitive funding applications. As Grants Coordinator in the Faculty Research Office, she supports researchers by identifying and aligning national and international funding opportunities with their research priorities, and by coordinating strong proposal development. Always looking for new tools and approaches to spot funding opportunities, Boitumelo is dedicated to equipping researchers with the skills to secure funding and advance impactful research.

Despite significant investment in digital research administration systems, data integrity and decision-ready reporting remain persistent challenges in research management. At the University of Cape Town (UCT), the transition from paper-based processes to an electronic Research Administration (eRA) platform has strengthened workflow standardisation, compliance tracking, and institutional oversight across the grant lifecycle.

UCT's eRA system supports end-to-end proposal and award management, guiding principal investigators, finance staff, faculty-level approvers, and legal advisors through structured submission, budget validation, approval, contracting, and post-award processes. While the platform provides dashboards and real-time reporting, the reliability of these outputs depends on the accuracy, completeness, and consistency of data captured at each stage.

In practice, variations in data entry, inconsistent interpretation of required fields, incomplete records, and evolving funder conditions can create gaps that are not immediately visible. Recent disruptions in US federal funding served as a practical stress test for reporting processes at UCT. The need for rapid portfolio-level insight exposed instances where incomplete or inconsistently captured data within the eRA system limited immediate strategic visibility. Staff in the Research Office were required to validate records manually, engage directly with principal investigators to confirm project details, and apply institutional knowledge to contextualise system outputs. This experience demonstrated that digital infrastructure alone does not guarantee digital readiness without strong data governance and skilled human oversight.

This presentation explores practical strategies for strengthening digital readiness in research offices, including clearer data-capture guidance, defined data-ownership roles, ongoing staff training, validation mechanisms, and cross-functional coordination. Sustainable digital transformation in research and innovation management depends not only on implementing systems, but on investing in the human expertise required to ensure their integrity and strategic value.

— Measuring change, one story at a time: Building an evidence-plus-story model, research visibility at NUST

Mr Nigel M'kwaira¹, Ms Victoria Shipanga

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Nigel M'kwaira is a Science and Innovation Communication Specialist at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), based in the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships (DRIP). His work supports translating research and innovation into clear, credible narratives for diverse audiences. His work strengthens research visibility, stakeholder engagement, and evidence of societal impact aligning institutional achievements with national development priorities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Nigel contributes to strategic communications for flagship initiatives, partnerships, and events, helping position NUST as an emerging, impact-driven university within the region.

The Namibia University of Science and Technology is reimagining how a young university can make its research and innovation portfolio visible and meaningful to diverse stakeholders. Without purposeful communication, scholarly outputs and societal benefits can remain unseen by the public, funders and benchmarking systems. This paper presents NUST's in progress shift towards an "evidence+story" communication model.

As a starting point, NUST has used international benchmarking tools, including the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, to strengthen credibility and establish a baseline for SDG aligned performance reporting. These results provide verifiable anchors that can be translated into stakeholder-relevant messages and used to prioritise impact narratives, including SDG specific positioning. Building on this foundation, the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships has launched ImpactTrack under the banner Measuring Change, One Story at a Time: a developing digital hub intended to curate SDG focused success stories backed by traceable evidence.

Implementation is being designed around three linked work streams (1) strengthening the "evidence spine" through consistent metadata, outputs registers, repository links, and basic indicators aligned to SDGs. (2) co-producing impact stories with researchers and partners using a structured template (problem → research contribution → change/outcomes → supporting artifacts). (3) Enhancing digital visibility and engagement by packaging content for different audiences via web, podcasts and social media, while protecting scientific accuracy. This is informed by evidence that institutions often rely on events and traditional media, and that multi-channel strategies can strengthen dissemination.

Expected outcomes include improved visibility, stronger stakeholder engagement, and reduced reporting friction for researchers through reusable templates and shared evidence, positioning NUST as a world class research institution delivering impactful, community centered, SDG aligned research. It discusses early lessons and design considerations for institutions seeking to build resilient, inclusive systems for making research impact visible across borders, languages and audiences.

— A systems era for research administration

Ms Bontle Moleme¹, Ms Barbara Herweg¹

¹Wits Commercial Enterprise, Braamfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Bontle Moleme is a dedicated Project Coordinator with ten years of experience in office administration and research management. Currently pursuing a BCom in Project Management (2026). Proficient in financial management, stakeholder relations, and project execution. Trained in Wits systems and Oracle, she has coordinated local and international research and commercial projects. A SARIMA Early Career Excellence Award winner. Passionate about driving meaningful impact through efficient project coordination and continuous professional development.

In 2019, Wits Enterprise (WE) Research Management (RM) team comprised of four coordinators, using manual processes; with limitations that included time constraints, and accessibility to critical information.

The team has grown and has transitioned to digital processes. The projects have grown in quantity and complexity; spread across multiple regions with varying auditing, reporting and legal frameworks and requiring non-traditional support.

WE have transitioned to a digital platform, and a digital workflow. The benefits include accessibility to information using digital tools for communication and cloud document storage. Additionally, productivity has increased.

This shift has been universal and allows for access to collaborative opportunities, knowledge sharing, skills development and the broad benchmarking of competencies within the greater RM community.

The changes in the RM landscape within our context requires further improvements of systems; to take advantage of innovations such as AI to refine aspects of the services we provide.

We are in the initial stages of this development and would like to share this process with the RM community. We have undertaken a gap analysis to identify areas for improvement along with risks that should be mitigated. We have used this information to develop an initial framework for the system to be developed.

In this talk we will focus on the initial steps and the potential for future developments including automation; the consequences for the future of early-stage RM professionals for example the need to be technologically informed, to use and critically evaluate digital systems for benefits and associated risks.

Digital transformation provides agility to pivot quickly, fostering a flexible environment to effectively support projects of any scope or complexity but requires current RM professionals to evaluate their processes to identify areas for improvement and step into the automated workspace.

— Telling stories of impact - Platforms and paper trails

Mrs Ravini Moodley¹

¹Stellenbosch University - Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Ravini is an experienced leader in innovation and technology management. She has managed technology development projects from start to finish and ultimately profitable exits from start-up companies. The experience includes conducting due diligence analyses, project management and stakeholder management. The experience is backed up by solid international training and qualifications in technology and innovation management. She also has extensive experience in the agriculture industry having worked in regulatory and extension portfolios. She is currently the Director of the Innovus TTO at Stellenbosch University.

Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) play a critical role in translating publicly funded research into innovations that generate economic, social, and environmental benefits. However, traditional metrics used to evaluate technology transfer—such as patents filed, licenses executed, and spin-offs created—often fail to capture the broader societal value generated through research commercialization. As expectations for research impact and accountability increase, there is a growing need for TTOs to communicate compelling narratives that demonstrate how university innovations improve lives, address global challenges, and contribute to national development goals.

Impact storytelling has emerged as an important mechanism for showcasing the outcomes of technology transfer and strengthening engagement with policymakers, funders, industry partners, and the public. International initiatives such as the AUTM Better World Project, ASTP knowledge transfer case studies, PraxisAuril impact awards, and European Patent Office innovation case studies provide structured platforms for institutions to highlight successful pathways from research discovery to real-world application. In addition, institutional research-impact portals and global technology dissemination platforms further enable universities to share stories of innovation and societal benefit.

This presentation explores the importance of impact storytelling as a strategic communication tool for TTOs and provides an overview of existing platforms that facilitate the dissemination of technology transfer success stories. It further looks at the data that needs to be collected and managing confidential and non-confidential information. Some mechanisms for collecting and managing data from early in the process are discussed. It is noted that strengthening the visibility of research impact through structured storytelling can enhance recognition of the value of technology transfer.

Declaration: The author is a member of the AUTM Better World Project Committee.

— Rebuilding the professoriate pipeline: The Mandela Imvuselelo Programme for accelerating research leadership and institutional impact

Dr Palesa Mothapo¹

¹Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Biography:

Palesa is an award-winning and accomplished Scientist and Research Manager currently serving as Director: Research Support and Management at Nelson Mandela University, overseeing strategic research priorities, policies, research strategy, grants management, research business advancement, and research intelligence. She has proven expertise in securing research funding, leading high-impact interdisciplinary research initiatives, and establishing global university-industry collaborations. Palesa is passionate about fostering a culture of research excellence, innovation, and entrepreneurship while driving impactful and policy-aligned research.

Across many African universities, a structural challenge is emerging: an ageing professoriate combined with slow progression pathways for mid-career researchers. This dynamic threatens the sustainability of research leadership, mentorship capacity, and the long-term vitality of institutional research systems. In response, Nelson Mandela University established the Mandela Imvuselelo Professors Programme, a strategic institutional intervention designed to accelerate the progression of mid-career researchers toward professorial ranks while strengthening the university's research leadership pipeline. The programme targets talented mid-career academics and provides a structured pathway for leadership and research development. Through a series of bespoke training modules and mentorship platforms, participants receive targeted support in areas including research leadership, NRF rating readiness, grant writing, international collaboration, research visibility, science communication, supervision and mentorship, research team leadership, and the development of research enterprises and research entrepreneurship. Importantly, the programme is integrated with institutional human resource and promotion frameworks, enabling clearer career progression pathways for participants within their faculties and departments. Beyond individual development, the initiative addresses broader institutional priorities. By strengthening the pipeline of future professors, the programme contributes to research sustainability in anticipation of significant retirements at associate and full professor level. It also supports institutional transformation by advancing talented researchers earlier in their careers, enabling greater diversity and longevity within the professoriate. The programme also demonstrates how research management offices can act as architects of institutional research impact by designing strategic leadership development interventions that strengthen research capacity, align institutional policy frameworks, and enable researchers to translate knowledge into societal value. This presentation reflects on the governance structures, policy interventions, and institutional negotiations required to secure investment and buy-in for such programmes, while also addressing concerns related to talent mobility and retention. The programme offers a replicable model for universities seeking to strengthen research leadership pipelines and enable long-term research impact.

— Navigating uncertainty through strategic focus: A curriculum-driven framework for building resilient research ecosystems in Universities

Prof Eltony Mugomeri¹

¹Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe

Biography:

Prof. Eltony Mugomeri is an Associate Professor and Director in the Office of Research and Innovation at Africa University, a private pan-African Methodist related institution, situated in Zimbabwe. He is a biomedical scientist trained in Zimbabwe and South Africa and has served as a public health professional and research manager in Lesotho (2007-2018) and Zimbabwe (2018 - to date). He has the experience working as instructor in the Global Public Health 'PatentX' Program and has served as the research manager and technical lead in the TIFA funded projects in Zimbabwe (2020-2025).

The contemporary higher education landscape in Africa is marked by profound uncertainty, characterized by resource constraints, evolving regulatory frameworks, and the need to respond to complex societal challenges. For new and emerging universities, building a resilient research and innovation ecosystem requires a deliberate strategy that moves beyond ad-hoc development to focus limited resources for maximum impact. This presentation introduces a practical framework for drafting and managing focused research pathways, developed from direct observations as a research director at Africa University (AU).

The core challenge addressed is the need for a credible, bottom-up methodology to identify institutionally relevant research priorities. The framework, piloted across AU's five colleges—(1) Health, Agriculture and Natural Sciences; (2) Social Sciences, Theology, Humanities and Education; (3) Law; (4) Engineering and Applied Sciences; and (5) Business and Management Sciences—synthesizes potential research areas directly from the focus of existing taught curricula. The methodology employs a three-stage process: first, a comprehensive audit of all courses within a college to map their core thematic concerns; second, a series of participatory workshops with faculty to synthesize these themes into coherent, multi-disciplinary research clusters, ensuring academic ownership and alignment with teaching expertise; and third, a structured prioritization exercise using criteria such as potential for societal impact, alignment with national development goals, and infrastructural feasibility to select the top two areas for strategic investment in labs and machinery.

By grounding research priorities in the curriculum, the framework ensures that new investments are immediately actionable by faculty and students. This approach not only optimizes the use of scarce resources but also builds institutional adaptability and a resilient research culture capable of responding to disruptions. The presentation will share lessons learned from implementing this framework at AU, offering a replicable model for research managers across Africa seeking to build robust and adaptive R&I ecosystems.

— From benchmarking to institutional innovation: How NUST reimagined cross-border partnerships for postgraduate and researcher development

Ms Rennie Munyayi¹

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Rennie Munyayi is Manager for Research and Postgraduate Development at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), where she leads initiatives in postgraduate policy reform, researcher development, and student success. With over a decade of experience in research management, grant administration, and monitoring and evaluation, she works across faculties to strengthen systems that support research impact, inclusion, and accountability. She holds Master's degrees from the University of Zimbabwe and Stellenbosch University, and is pursuing a PhD at the University of the Western Cape. Her work focuses on translating benchmarking and strategic partnerships into institutional innovation in African higher education.

In higher education, benchmarking is often treated as a learning exercise rather than a catalyst for institutional change. This paper presents how the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Partnerships (DRIP) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) has taken forward lessons from benchmarking engagements with Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Pretoria, and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) to reimagine postgraduate and researcher development through strategic collaboration across disciplines and borders. Collectively, these engagements exposed NUST to a range of approaches to postgraduate support, researcher development, institutional coordination, and monitoring systems. The benchmarking highlighted recurring design features associated with stronger institutional performance, which includes visible central coordination, pipeline thinking, blended support models, data-informed design, equity-oriented programming, and strong partnerships across faculties and support units. The NUST Research and Postgraduate Development 2025 benchmarking report specifically identified these elements as priority lessons for adaptation at NUST. Rather than replicate external models, NUST used these lessons as inputs into an institutional reflection process aimed at contextual adaptation, scalability, and impact. In particular, the earlier benchmarking with Stellenbosch University in 2024 helped inspire the concept of a more structured Postgraduate Academy, while the broader benchmarking process and subsequent institutional workshop helped shape two additional flagship initiatives: the Emerging Researchers Initiative and the Postgraduate Throughput Tracker. Together, these initiatives signal a shift from fragmented support to a more integrated institutional ecosystem for postgraduate success, early-career researcher development, and evidence-based decision-making. This approach demonstrates that strategic partnerships across borders are most valuable when they build institutional reflexivity and adaptive capacity rather than imitation. The NUST case offers a practical model for how African universities can translate benchmarking into context-responsive innovation in research and innovation management for resilience, impact, and inclusion.

— Closing the compliance gap: Ethics governance and the Nagoya protocol in research practice

Ms Kimera Naicker¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

I am a Permit Compliance Officer and Research Ethics Support Administrator at Stellenbosch University, specialising in regulatory compliance for research at the institution. My work focuses on ensuring that research activities align with national legislation and international frameworks. I support researchers in navigating complex permitting processes and promote responsible, legally compliant research practices that safeguard biodiversity and uphold ethical research standards

Ethics approval is widely considered as the primary safeguard for responsible research involving biodiversity and Indigenous knowledge. However, institutional experience shows a critical compliance gap: research may receive ethics approval while still failing to meet the requirements of the Nagoya Protocol and South Africa's Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) regulations under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA). This gap often arises because researchers are unaware that projects involving biological resources or Indigenous Knowledge Systems require additional regulatory processes, including bioprospecting permits, prior informed consent from knowledge holders, and formal benefit-sharing agreements. As a result, institutions may unintentionally enable research that bypasses legal and ethical obligations intended to protect community rights and ensure equitable participation in research outcomes.

Within many institutions, structural blind spots can cause this gap in knowledge. Research ethics review processes and regulatory compliance mechanisms are often poorly integrated, awareness of ABS obligations among researchers remains limited, and there is uncertainty about appropriate engagement with Indigenous knowledge holders.

This analysis considers how research ethics committees and research management offices are uniquely positioned to address this compliance gap by embedding Nagoya-aligned requirements into institutional governance frameworks. Particular attention is given to research that may trigger bioprospecting obligations under NEMBA, including studies involving Indigenous medicinal plants, the collection of biological samples for genetic analysis, the use of traditional knowledge related to species properties, or collaborations with Indigenous knowledge holders to identify or characterise biological resources. Practical interventions are discussed, including early-stage protocol screening to identify potential ABS triggers, strengthened institutional guidance for researchers, and improved coordination between ethics review processes and permit compliance mechanisms.

Reframing Nagoya compliance as a core component of research ethics and equity can help institutions safeguard Indigenous rights, strengthen research integrity, and support more inclusive and accountable knowledge production.

— Institutional strategies for postdoctoral research fellowships in South African universities: Implications for societal impact

Dr Maanda Ndhlovu¹

¹University of South Africa - Graduate School Of Business Leadership, Midrand, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Maanda Ndhlovu is Manager: Research and Innovation at the University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership. He has over ten years of experience in research administration and innovation management within the higher education sector. His work focuses on strengthening research capacity, supporting postgraduate programmes, and creating enabling environments for impactful research. Dr Ndhlovu played a key role in launching the UNISA Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme in 2014, introducing the Senior Postdoctoral category in 2023, and managing the National Postdoctoral Fellowship Forum in 2024. He holds a PhD from UNISA and is currently pursuing a Master of Business Leadership.

Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (PDRFs) play an increasingly strategic role in strengthening research capacity, advancing knowledge production, and supporting innovation systems within universities. In the South African higher education landscape, universities are expected not only to produce high-quality academic outputs but also to contribute to broader societal transformation and national development priorities. However, institutional strategies governing PDRF programmes often remain strongly oriented toward traditional academic performance indicators such as publication outputs, citation metrics, and research funding acquisition. This raises questions regarding how effectively these programmes are aligned with broader societal impact objectives. This paper examines the institutional strategies guiding PDRF programmes in South African universities and explores their implications for societal impact. Drawing on Public Value Theory, Stakeholder Theory, the Resource-Based View, and the Triple Helix Model, the research investigates how institutional governance frameworks, strategic priorities, and performance management systems shape the role of postdoctoral fellows within university research ecosystems. The research adopts an interpretivist paradigm and employs a qualitative multiple case study design. Data will be collected through document analysis of institutional strategies, research policies, and postdoctoral programme frameworks, as well as semi-structured interviews with research managers and postdoctoral coordinators across selected South African universities. Thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns relating to governance structures, institutional support mechanisms, performance evaluation systems, and conceptualisations of societal impact. The research aims to identify strategic gaps between institutional research productivity objectives and broader public value creation. By examining how PDRF programmes are embedded within institutional strategies and innovation ecosystems, the research seeks to propose a strategic alignment framework that strengthens the contribution of postdoctoral programmes to societal impact. The findings are expected to contribute to debates on research governance, research capacity development, and the strategic role of postdoctoral fellows in advancing socially responsive research within South Africa's higher education system.

— The art of making your spinout attractive for investment

Mrs Anita Nel¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Anita Nel is the Chief Director: Innovation and Commercialisation of Stellenbosch University. She is a well-respected contributor to the international technology transfer fraternity, and serves on the Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals Peer Review and Course Review panels. Anita has established the highly successful SU LaunchLab incubator and was instrumental in establishing the University Technology Fund that provides funding for South African university spinouts. Her role was expanded to the university's commercial division which is responsible for non-research related commercial activities that include copyright, short courses, trademarks, residential and catering services, the botanical garden, rental, transport services, and retail.

In a climate where licensing university technologies is becoming increasingly challenging, university spinout companies are evolving into a cornerstone of research commercialisation, translating academic breakthroughs into high-growth ventures that drive innovation, jobs, and economic impact. Yet, attracting investment into these ventures remains a global challenge that hinges on how universities structure equity, align stakeholder expectations around especially access to intellectual property, and de-risk early-stage technologies.

This presentation will focus on lessons learned in this regard, supported by an overview of international trends and university approaches to spinout formation and it offers a guideline to achieve success with local spinout company programmes.

— Building resilient and inclusive financial research administration and management through community of practice for impact

Mrs Carin Niemand¹

¹UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Carin Niemand is a Research Funding Specialist in the Research Directorate at the University of South Africa (UNISA), where she supports researchers across the full lifecycle of externally funded research. With extensive experience in research financial administration, she plays a key role in strengthening institutional practices for managing research funding. Carin is actively involved in sector initiatives within the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) and is the initiator of the Financial Research Administration and Management Community of Practice (FRAM-COP), which aims to advance collaboration, knowledge sharing, and Professionalisation in financial research administration across Southern Africa.

As research funding environments become increasingly complex and compliance expectations intensify, Financial Research Administration and Management (FRAM) has become a critical component of institutional resilience, accountability, and the responsible stewardship of research resources. Across many institutions in Southern Africa, financial research administrators often operate within fragmented institutional structures with limited opportunities for coordinated learning, collaboration, and professional development. This fragmentation can contribute to inconsistent financial practices, duplication of effort, and increased financial and compliance risks in the management of externally funded research.

The Financial Research Administration and Management Community of Practice (FRAM-COP) was initiated as a collaborative, practitioner-driven response to these challenges and has recently been approved in principle by the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA). The initiative aims to strengthen the effectiveness and professionalisation of financial research administration by supporting improved practices in research funding management and enhancing the ability of institutions to demonstrate the uptake, utilisation, and impact of funded research.

FRAM-COP is currently being operationalised through a series of sector workshops and stakeholder engagements designed to bring together financial and research administrators to exchange practical experience, identify shared challenges, and collaboratively explore solutions across the research funding lifecycle. These engagements focus on key elements of financial research administration, including proposal budgeting, contracting, financial governance, compliance reporting, and strengthening financial practices that enable the effective use and impact of research funding. This presentation reflects on the development journey and early implementation of FRAM-COP, highlighting insights emerging from initial sector engagements. It demonstrates how communities of practice can strengthen professional capability, improve research funding management practices, and support institutions in maximising the uptake, utilisation, and societal impact of research investments. By fostering collaborative learning and sector-wide engagement, FRAM-COP contributes to building resilient, inclusive, and impact-oriented research management systems across the Southern African research landscape.

— Pathways for university research commercialisation: A scoping review

Ms Mashudu Nxumalo¹

¹ University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Mashudu has over 8 years of experience in Technology Transfer at a South African University and two state entities, in the nuclear energy and agriculture sectors.

Closely working together with the other members of the Technology Transfer Office Team, Mashudu is responsible for the technology transfer and commercialization of Stellenbosch University's Intellectual Property through patenting, licensing, and the formation of spin-out companies.

Mashudu holds a BSc in Microbiology and a BSc Honors from the University of Limpopo. She also obtained her MSc Microbiology from the University of Pretoria.

University Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) play a critical role in translating academic research into products and services that address economic and societal challenges. However, the journey from disclosure of the research to commercialisation is often complex and non-linear. Understanding and mapping the pathways that support research translation is therefore essential for improving the effectiveness of university commercialisation processes.

This study conducts a scoping review of the literature on university research commercialisation pathways to examine how these pathways are defined and operationalised. The review aims to identify key actors, processes, and factors that influence the successful translation of research into commercially viable products, services, and societal solutions.

By synthesising existing evidence, the study highlights current strengths and gaps in the literature on university commercialisation pathways and provides insights to support TTOs in developing more structured and effective approaches to research commercialisation.

— Integrating legal oversight into research ethics and research management

Mr Ayakha Nyangeni¹, Miss Naseema Sondag¹, Mr Ollof Esterhuizen¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Ayakha Nyangeni serves as a Legal Advisor: Research Contracts & Compliance in the Research Contracts unit, which forms part of the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University. In this capacity, he advises academic staff, postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students on the negotiation and drafting of research-related agreements. Beyond contract negotiation, Ayakha provides guidance on regulatory compliance in the research environment.

Stellenbosch University (SU) has adopted a unique institutional framework for research governance that positions its legal advisors at the critical intersection of ethics review and research data management. The presence of dedicated legal advisors on both the Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the Research Data Management (RDM) Advisory Committee represents an innovative structural intervention in research management process. This dual representation ensures a coherent, integrated perspective across the lifecycle of research. In conventional research institutional arrangements, these domains often operate in silos. Ethics committees focus narrowly on participant protection and hazards, while data management structures often address technical, storage, and data sharing/collection methods. Consequently, what we see is fragmentation, duplicated effort, and unaddressed risks at the boundaries of research. By contrast, SU's model fosters seamless bridging. Legal advisors, that are sensitive to the nuances of regulatory compliance, intellectual property, privacy law, and contractual liabilities, can identify issues early. Potential concerns identified during REC deliberations can be promptly escalated to the RDM Advisory Committee or the relevant Research support function. This proactive coordination reduces the administrative burden on researchers, assists in accelerating the approval process, and embeds risk mitigation into the fabric of research management. The approach is aimed at elevating compliance from a reactive checklist exercise to a strategic capability, reducing exposure to legal, reputational, and ethical breaches. In an era where data-intensive research increasingly intersects with complex statutory regimes such as POPIA and the GDPR, the relevance and benefit of such integrated oversight has proven to be not merely efficient but essential for any institution of Higher Learning with a research focus. Ultimately, SU's approach demonstrates how legal insight, strategically positioned, can transform governance from a burden into a facilitator of responsible, high-impact research

— Case study: The use of technology in the annual submission of research publications for subsidy

Mrs Dalene Pieterse¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Dalene Pieterse has been involved in research management for more than twenty years. She has a Masters in Science in Physiology from SU and also completed a postgraduate degree, Baccalaureus in Philosophy, in Knowledge Management cum laude in 2013. She is the manager for research information & strategy at the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University and has been involved in research management and in particular research information management on various levels. She has presented at several national and international conferences over the years and has co-authored a chapter in the The Emerald Handbook of Research Management and Administration.

In South Africa one of the measures used to calculate subsidy allocation to higher education institutions (HEI's) is the annual submission of research publications to the Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET). This process has been in place for almost forty years and has seen many iterations over this period. There can be no doubt that it has stimulated research productivity at HEI's but it has unfortunately also led to a number of unintended consequences. It is therefore of the utmost important that this process is handled with the utmost diligence, ensuring on the one hand maximum benefit to the institution subsidy wise but simultaneously adhering to sound research publication practices and responsible reporting.

This case study will show the evolvement of this process over the last thirty years at Stellenbosch University (SU). SU, like many HEI's, has seen a dramatic increase in research publications over this period. This increase in output, together with a demand from DHET for more detailed information on submitted publications, has necessitated the SU research office to find innovative ways to deal with the increased complexity in reporting. In this presentation the focus will be on the utilization of technology to ensure that this assessment exercise is handled effectively and that the integrity of the process is intact as far as possible.

— Closing the policy–practice gap: Staff awareness of duplicate publication and text recycling

Mrs Dorcas Ramodipa-Ndou¹, Ms Leonie Louw¹

¹University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Dorcas Ramodipa-Ndou is a Research Information Officer at the University of South Africa, specialising in research publication output. She holds MBA.

Leonie Louw is a Research Ethics Advisor at the University of South Africa, specialising in research ethics, academic integrity and risk management. She holds dual masters' degrees in Occupational Safety and Health and Management Sciences. As a certified Ethics Ambassador, she has extensive experience in facilitating research ethics workshops and presenting at international conferences. Leonie authored publications on safety management, entrepreneurship and ethical leadership. She is passionate about fostering research excellence and professional development in Higher Education

Higher education's objectives remain grounded in research ethics and academic integrity, particularly amid growing publication pressures, increased internet access, and performance-driven institutional cultures. This presentation contributes to the Supporting Responsible Research Practices session by examining academic personnel's understanding of text recycling and disclosure and translating pilot findings into practical interventions for research offices and ethics/integrity functions.

The presentation reports on ethical awareness among academic employees at a South African higher education institution, focusing on the resubmission of previously published material, including self-plagiarism, text recycling, and duplicate publication. While institutional frameworks typically foreground student plagiarism, academics' publishing practices have received comparatively limited scholarly and administrative attention. The study examines employee knowledge of expectations regarding originality, prior dissemination, permissible text reuse, and disclosure duties.

Using a survey-based quantitative design, the research measures awareness, perceptions, and self-reported practices, while also exploring contextual drivers such as workload pressures, publication targets, and promotion criteria that may create ethically ambiguous decision-making. Pilot results will be presented to illustrate where policy knowledge diverges from practice.

Delegates will gain practical insights into common employee misconceptions and pressure points, with suggested discussion prompts and considerations for strengthening institutional guidance and support.

— The evolving role of pre-award research management professionals in an era of rapid technological change

Dr Bas Rijnen¹

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Dr. Bas Rijnen is a RM professional with over two decades of experience. He works as Projects Coordinator in the Directorate for Research, Innovation and Partnerships at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. He holds a Master's degree in Organisational Anthropology from Utrecht University and a PhD in Sport Management from the University of Johannesburg. Bas led the development of the Toolkit for Early-career Research Managers' Online Resources under the International Research Management Staff Development Programme and served on the Technical Committee for developing an African standard for Good Research Management Practice, spearheaded by the Science for Africa Foundation

Artificial intelligence and other technological developments have significantly transformed the work of the field of Research Management. This also specifically the case for the pre-award function at universities by making funding discovery, proposal development, and donor engagement more strategic and data-driven. Artificial intelligence tools can scan vast funding databases, government calls, and foundation announcements to quickly match researchers with relevant opportunities, saving time and increasing success rates. Predictive analytics help identify which proposals are most competitive based on past award patterns, while natural language tools assist in drafting, refining, and tailoring grant applications to specific funders. Artificial intelligence also supports stakeholder mapping by analyzing networks, publication records, and collaboration histories to identify potential partners or donors.

This all has implications on the profession of pre-award Research Managers as the job is slowly, but surely changing and certain tasks and function have to be filled in differently. Does this make our work redundant?

There is a shift visible from manual searching, proposal writing and administrative tasks toward higher-level strategy, relationship building, and impact storytelling, using artificial intelligence as a decision-support and efficiency tool rather than a replacement for professional judgment.

This presentation explores what is changing in the work of pre-award Research Managers and describes how we can embrace the technological advancements by investigating the key areas where we can bring added value.

— Rolling out measuring what matters: How NUST is building pathways, partnerships and impact evidence

Ms Victoria Shipanga¹, Mr Nigel M'kwaira¹

¹Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

Biography:

Victoria Shipanga is a Research Analyst in the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships (DRIP) at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). With 15+ years of experience in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems development and statistical data analysis, supporting evidence-based decision-making and performance reporting.

Her background spans the management of multidisciplinary research projects, public health programmes (including HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria), and complex donor-funded initiatives. With strong analytical capability and a commitment to data quality assurance while strengthening data management processes, improving reporting integrity, and enabling stakeholders to translate data into measurable outcomes and impact.

NUST's first participation in the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings became a practical catalyst for strengthening how NUST enables research for societal impact. Like many emerging institutions, NUST has had to navigate legacy perceptions that equate excellence with traditional academic outputs, alongside real resource constraints that limit the ability to capture, evidence and communicate non-academic value. The core challenge has been cultural and operational: embedding impact thinking early in the research lifecycle, while building credible, low-burden ways to measure what matters across social, economic and environmental dimensions.

NUST's in-progress "evidence+story" model, being rolled out through the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships, shaped by lessons from the institution's initial THE Impact Rankings submission and the technical guidance underpinning the ranking methodology and data requirements. The model has three connected components. First, Pathways: impact is planned at proposal stage through explicit pathways-to-impact stakeholder roles, uptake routes, assumptions and milestones, SDGs and national-priority alignment, and internal review criteria that prioritise interdisciplinary, applied and partner projects. Second, Partnerships: government, industry, and community actors are engaged as co-design and implementation partners to increase relevance, co-funding potential and routes for uptake into policy and practice. Third, Measuring: NUST is implementing a minimum viable impact evidence system automated to capture core outputs, a small set of outcome indicators such as policy influence, services improved, innovations adopted, people reached, and an ImpactTrack pilot that curates structured case narratives to add meaning and attribution behind the numbers.

Early implementation signals include improved impact literacy through targeted training, clearer SDG mapping across projects, stronger readiness for funder reporting, and better internal coordination of impact evidence. The paper contributes practical tools for research managers templates, governance touchpoints and a measurement-and-narrative workflow suited to resource constrained contexts seeking to demonstrate relevance and societal value beyond publications and patents.

— Leveraging regional innovation ecosystems: The role of technology transfer offices in enabling strategic innovation partnerships

Mrs Nolene Singh¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Nolene Singh is the Deputy Director of Technology Transfer at Stellenbosch University, where she leads the strategic management and commercialisation of the university's intellectual property portfolio. She works closely with researchers, industry, and innovation partners translating research into societal and economic impact through patenting, licensing, and spin-out company development. With over nine years' experience in innovation and IP management, Nolene is a registered Technology Transfer Professional (RTTP). She serves as a director of several university spin-out companies and as a board member of the LES SA. Nolene has an MSC and previously spent twelve years in the plant genetics industry.

Universities are increasingly expected to contribute to regional innovation systems by facilitating stronger collaboration between academia, industry, and broader innovation stakeholders. In many African contexts, technology transfer offices (TTOs) operate within evolving innovation ecosystems where engagement between universities and industry is still developing. This creates a need for approaches that move beyond transactional technology licensing towards more strategic and sustained partnerships.

At Stellenbosch University, the TTO has adopted a proactive approach to strengthening regional innovation engagement through initiatives such as the (1) Stellenbosch Network, which connects industry, government, researchers, and innovation stakeholders, and (2) sector-focused cluster events including Cape AgriTech Connect and Cape Health Connect. These platforms create opportunities for structured interaction between researchers, startups, corporates, and investors within priority sectors, enabling the university to play a more active role in shaping the regional innovation ecosystem.

The experience of developing these initiatives highlights three key lessons for technology transfer practice in emerging innovation ecosystems. First, structured engagement platforms matter. Networks and sector-focused events create spaces for stakeholders to connect, build awareness of university capabilities, and identify opportunities for collaboration. Second, relationships often precede transactions. Sustained engagement and trust-building between researchers and industry partners are essential precursors to successful partnerships. Third, technology licensing can act as a gateway to broader collaboration, with several industry partners initially engaging through licensing and subsequently seeking deeper, more strategic engagement with the university.

These experiences illustrate the evolving role of the TTO as an orchestrator of innovation relationships within regional ecosystems and highlight opportunities for African universities to strengthen the impact of their research through strategic partnership building.

— Rewiring postdoctoral oversight: A digital leap in monitoring and reporting

Ms Teresa Smit¹, Mrs MPE Meintjes¹

¹North-West University, South Africa, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Biography:

MPE Meintjes is a Research Support Coordinator at the North-West University, with more than 14 years of experience in research administration and management. In her current position, she mainly focuses on research development and has been managing the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship programme since 2014. She is also a member of the Research Output, Outcomes & Impact Community of Practice (CoP-ROOI).

In 2026 she received IPRC recognition as Research Management Professional (RMP) and obtained her MPhil in Science and Technology at Stellenbosch University with the topic: Early Career Researchers and Academic Publishing: A Systematic Literature Review 2000 to 2024.

Effective management of postdoctoral fellowship programmes is essential for strengthening research productivity, enhancing institutional capacity, and ensuring strategic investment in emerging scholars. However, fragmented reporting processes limit the ability of institutions to track performance, assess impact, and make evidence-based decisions. This presentation outlines an initiative developing a digitally supported reporting framework to centralise, streamline, and enhance the monitoring of postdoctoral fellows' research activities at a South African university.

The initiative replaces fragmented quarterly reporting with a centralised digital system designed to capture comprehensive information on research outputs, capacity-building participation, academic citizenship, and broader contributions by postdoctoral fellows. A standardised Excel reporting template and a structured Microsoft Teams environment provide a unified platform for data capture, transparent supervision, and continuous community engagement among fellows, supervisors, and faculty leadership. Quarterly submissions feed into an institutional dataset that informs extension or termination decisions, identifies development needs, and strengthens reporting for governance structures.

A future phase of the initiative explores integrating these processes into a research information management system to automate workflow routing, approvals, data capture, and long-term performance analytics. This digital approach supports more efficient programme management, improves data accuracy, and expands institutional capacity to demonstrate the value of postdoctoral programmes beyond publications alone - particularly in contexts where postdoctoral fellowships help address the scarcity of academic positions.

The presentation will provide a practical process flow, discuss quality-control mechanisms and verifications, and reflect on lessons learned during implementation. It will show how research managers can leverage digital tools to strengthen reporting, improve transparency, efficiency and strategic decision-making in managing postdoctoral research ecosystems.

The contribution aligns with the theme of Building Capacity for Digital Transformation in Research and Innovation Management by demonstrating a practical, scalable model for digital readiness within researcher-development programmes.

— The AI-augmented innovation lifecycle: Integrating research management and technology transfer

Mr Fredo Stroh¹

¹KISCH IP, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Fredo Ströh is a Director at KISCH IP with over 20 years' experience in intellectual property law. His practice spans patents, registered designs, plant breeders' rights and trademarks, with a particular focus on the prosecution of applications in South Africa and internationally. He also advises clients on the strategic management and enforcement of IP portfolios and on intellectual property aspects of commercial transactions. Fredo holds a BSc in Medical Sciences and an LLB, is an attorney of the High Court of South Africa, and has been a qualified patent attorney since 2012.

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the global research and innovation ecosystem, influencing not only how discoveries are made but also how innovation opportunities are identified and translated into societal impact. Yet discussions about AI in academia often focus narrowly on its use as a research tool rather than on its broader implications for how research and innovation systems are managed.

Traditionally, research management and technology transfer have often operated as largely sequential activities: research is conducted, results are published, inventions are disclosed, intellectual property is protected, and only thereafter are commercialisation pathways explored. This linear model can create fragmentation between research management and innovation functions, leading to missed intellectual property opportunities and delayed pathways to impact.

AI-enabled tools are beginning to challenge this model by enabling a more integrated and anticipatory innovation ecosystem. These systems can analyse global research and patent landscapes, identify emerging technology opportunities, detect potentially patentable discoveries earlier in the research process, and reveal potential industry partners or commercialisation pathways.

Particular attention will be given to the opportunities and challenges facing African research institutions as they integrate AI into research management, intellectual property strategy and technology transfer. At the same time, the growing role of AI raises governance questions, including algorithmic opacity, automation bias and the preservation of human accountability in innovation decision-making.

The presentation concludes with practical recommendations for research offices and technology transfer units seeking to integrate AI responsibly. It introduces an AI-Augmented Innovation Lifecycle framework that illustrates how AI can support institutions across the stages of research strategy, discovery, intellectual property identification and technology transfer while preserving human governance and accountability.

— Valuing contribution in collaborative research: Navigating evolving IP for equitable spin-outs

Mrs Chyreene Truluck¹

¹Spoor & Fisher, Centurion, South Africa

Biography:

Chyreene is a South African patent attorney specialising in Biotechnology and Life Sciences, with an MSc in Genetics and an LLB. A partner at Spoor & Fisher, she has over 15 years' experience in IP management, focusing on patent prosecution, commercial IP matters, and plant breeders' rights. She is a Fellow of SAIPL and a member of LES South Africa. Chyreene contributes to leading life sciences law publications and has received multiple professional accolades, including the 2018 DSI/SARIMA Award for Innovation Management and rankings in Euromoney, Best Lawyers®, MIP, and IAM Patent 1000.

Collaborative, long-duration research projects present unique challenges when valuing contributions to intellectual property (IP), particularly as teams evolve and different types of IP emerge over time. This presentation explores how shifting scientific effort, changing personnel, and diverse IP outputs influence contribution valuation and, ultimately, equity allocation in spin-out companies.

The complexity is heightened in research contexts where early, well-defined IP—such as patents or tangible embodiments like cell lines—later evolves into incremental improvements, unprotected optimisations, and enabling know-how generated by new contributors. These varied forms of IP rarely align neatly with formal inventorship or institutional policies, yet all play critical roles in determining commercial viability.

A case study will be presented to illustrate these dynamics in the field of biotechnology: the initial IP consisted of a patented invention and cell line; subsequent, unprotected improvements were added to the cell line through a collaboration; and finally, one of the collaborators found a new partner to generate the enabling know-how and feasibility data needed to support commercialisation. When the spin-out ultimately licensed the composite IP package, stakeholders faced difficult questions about relative value, contribution, and fair equity distribution.

The presentation proposes practical approaches—such as contribution-mapping and lifecycle IP-tracking—to support more transparent and equitable valuation in collaborative research ecosystems.

— Mentoring programme design and implementation for the strengthening of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration

Dr Henriëtte Van Den Berg¹

¹University of Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Dr. Henriëtte van den Berg established the Future Professoriate Mentoring Programme at the University of the Free State, fostering a vibrant culture of research excellence and societal impact. Her mentorship empowered a diverse generation of scholars leading in academia and research. She is a registered psychologist with a Ph.D. in Psychology from UFS, with a passion for training psychologists, supervising postgraduate students, coordinating research projects and mentoring young academics. Her unique blend of clinical expertise, academic leadership, and passionate mentorship continues to inspire and shape the future of research leadership at UFS, embodying a commitment to excellence and transformative impact.

Mentorship is gaining support as an effective tool for nurturing and developing early career scholars. The benefits of mentoring include research competency development of academic staff, academic identity development, providing social and emotional support amongst mentors and peers, expanding national and international networks and integrating early career scholars into academic communities. The cumulative impact of these benefits strengthens the research ecosystem and has the potential to change the research culture of the institution. This presentation explores how this comprehensive, institutional mentoring programme enhanced research impact, international collaboration and broader societal impact of a group of 200 early career scholars. The presentation will contribute to the understanding of critical design elements of the programme and the mechanisms of change that contributed to the increased research impact of the participants. The case study maps out the evolution of the mentoring programme over a period of five years. The programme provided structured and unstructured elements, discipline-specific and peer mentoring as well as tangible research support to address context-specific constraints young academic experience. During the five years of implementation, the 200 participants benefitted from the programme and has shown significant career progression with remarkable achievements in research, leadership and innovation. Key lessons learned for the design and delivery include the necessity of constantly assessing the impact of the programme on participants' sense of institutional engagement and belonging and their mastery of the competencies required to develop successful research careers. Mentors played a strategic role introducing mentees to national and international research networks, broadening participants' scholarly connections. The programme has cultivated a critical mass of alumni and current members who actively shape the institution's research culture and strategic direction.

— Integrated organisational communication as research infrastructure: Enabling impact in a multi-site African health research unit

Mrs Theranne van Vuren¹, Dr Fazanah Laher¹

¹Wits Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA), Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Theranne van Vuren is a senior research management leader at the Wits Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA) Research Unit in Johannesburg, South Africa. She provides strategic oversight of grants, finance, governance, compliance, and shared services within a complex donor-funded health research environment. Her work focuses on strengthening institutional systems that enable responsible research practices, resilient partnerships, and measurable societal impact. Theranne has a particular interest in digital transformation, equitable collaboration, and integrated organisational communication that aligns research strategy, operations, and stakeholder engagement across the research lifecycle within the African research management ecosystem.

In complex, donor-funded health research environments, impact is often framed in terms of publications, grants, and policy translation. Yet the enabling architecture behind impact — particularly integrated organisational communication — remains under-theorised and under-measured. This presentation draws on governance and operational practice from the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA) Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, a multi-site African health research unit operating across clinical trials, observational studies, shared services, and community engagement platforms.

The presentation argues that integrated organisational communication is not a “soft” function but a form of research infrastructure. At VIDA, structured communication pathways link grants management, HR, finance, operations, data teams, and investigators through aligned planning cycles, onboarding systems, policy frameworks, internal campaigns, and cross-functional monthly alignment forums. These mechanisms reduce duplication, improve protocol readiness, strengthen compliance, and accelerate study start-up timelines across sites.

Using practical examples — including internal communication calendars, structured onboarding workflows, community-to-research feedback loops, and leadership-aligned messaging frameworks — the presentation demonstrates how communication becomes a governance tool that supports strategic coherence and donor accountability.

Critically, the session proposes measurable indicators for enabling impact beyond bibliometrics: turnaround times, staff retention, cross-site alignment metrics, policy adoption rates, and stakeholder engagement indicators.

For research management professionals across the Global South operating in volatile funding landscapes, this case offers a replicable governance-communication model that positions integrated communication as a strategic enabler of research resilience, collaboration, and measurable societal impact.

— Advancing professionalisation in research management through an organisational readiness assessment

Dr Retha Visagie¹, Ms Leonie Louw¹

¹UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Retha Visagie is a Senior Research Management Professional certified by the International Professional Recognition Council (IPRC) and a recognised leader in research ethics, governance, and capacity strengthening across Africa. With more than a decade of experience, she develops policy frameworks, training programmes, and research management systems that advance responsible research conduct and institutional integrity. Her current work focuses on Artificial Intelligence in research management and education, promoting AI literacy and responsible use to strengthen governance, data stewardship, and compliance. A UNESCO-certified ethics educator and Virt2ue trainer, she has trained ten thousand professionals and contributes to research governance initiatives worldwide.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Leonie Louw is a Research Ethics Advisor at the University of South Africa whose work bridges research ethics with occupational health, safety, and environmental management. She holds an MS in Occupational Safety and Health (magna cum laude) from Columbia Southern University and an MCom in Management Sciences from Unisa, and is pursuing a PhD in Management Studies. Leonie designs and facilitates workshops on responsible research conduct, IPRC professional recognition, and SHEQ-related risks. An award-winning research management professional (2025 SARIMA Early Career Excellence Award), she also mentors peers in achieving IPRC recognition, advancing responsible research through scholarship, and developing professional capacity.

The Southern African Research and Innovation Association (SARIMA) Professional Competency Framework (PCF) guides the professionalisation of Research Managers and Administrators (RMAs) by articulating key competency areas required for effective research management. In line with this framework, an Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) institution launched a professionalisation drive to advance the professional development of its RMA cohort. This leadership drive toward professionalisation aligns with the broader SARIMA regional imperative within the Southern African Development Community to elevate the professional status of RMAs. Strengthening competencies across the nine key domains identified in the SARIMA PCF supports not only individual career progression but also institutional resilience, governance maturity, and the credibility of the research ecosystem.

Despite the initiative's implementation, the limited uptake of professionalisation across the institution necessitated an Organisational Readiness Assessment (ORA) to inform a more targeted, strategic approach to advancing RMAs' professionalisation. An ORA is a structured process used to explore whether an institution is adequately prepared to implement a new initiative successfully. It shifts the focus beyond aspirational intent to position the initiative within a strategically aligned change strategy.

In this paper, we demonstrate how an ORA can guide research-producing organisations in advancing structured professional pathways for RMA professionals. The study adopted an institutional, step-by-step case study design. Step 1, the focus of this paper, entailed a contextual analysis to determine eligibility for programme participation, assess awareness of professional recognition pathways, and gauge the appetite among various RMA cohorts to pursue professionalisation. The primary aim of this phase was to explore the enabling conditions for advancing professional recognition within the ODeL institution. The initial findings indicate low awareness among qualifying RMAs of professionalisation and emerging strategic readiness. The findings inform practical recommendations to enable research-producing organisations to advance professionalisation through the application of an ORA.

—Africa-Europe innovation platform: A network of networks shaping balanced and impactful innovation partnerships

Ms Rosemary Wolson¹, Dr Prenitha Sewnarain, Ms Asuka Heltmann

¹SARIMA, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Rosemary began her career in technology transfer at UCT where, as one of the early tech transfer practitioners in SA, she was involved in establishing a new technology transfer office and developing the research contract management function. She subsequently joined the CSIR, where she was responsible for managing the institution's IP to support the transfer of CSIR technologies for the benefit of SA and society at large, followed by a period as Director of the Technology Transfer Office at the University of Johannesburg. She is currently operating as an independent consultant, providing research and innovation support across the value chain.

The Africa-Europe Innovation Platform (AEIP) is a Horizon Europe project that serves to coordinate and support cross-continental partnerships for research and innovation (R&I) along the innovation value chain. The project responds to the increasing number of rich collaboration initiatives between Africa and Europe, and the diversity of the stakeholder groups engaged through them, providing them with a digital space and community building opportunities to foster further exchange and partnerships.

The digital platform serves as a network of networks, hosting a directory of initiatives from the ecosystem and a partner finder to build connections. Moreover, innovation stakeholders can share and discover resources, funding schemes, and events that connect African-European R&I stakeholders and foster partnerships, creating a centralised space for and by the ecosystem. Major actors and initiatives backed by the African Union and the European Union are also featured on the platform.

The AEIP also brings together these actors with online and in-person events, through a series of knowledge exchange, capacity building and networking activities. The Innovation Dialogues (annual stakeholder meetings) are core to these. Hosting of the dialogues alternates between African and European locations, bringing together stakeholders along the innovation value chain to highlight recent developments in the R&I ecosystems, and the activities of the AEIP.

Other AEIP activities include hosting a twinning programme for business support organisations, as well as thematic challenges focused on pairing African and European entities for addressing priority areas around the green transition, public health, digitalisation, and more.

The AEIP therefore acts as a central partnership forum for African-European R&I collaboration, connecting civil society representatives, policymakers, academia, business, diaspora organisations, start-ups, and other key stakeholders, shaping a more balanced, impactful, and future-oriented Africa–Europe R&I partnership landscape. The presentation will highlight opportunities for using the platform to build African-European partnerships.

POSTER ABSTRACTS:

— Strengthening IP management: From data to decision-making through integrated dashboards

Mrs Mari Berner¹

¹North-west University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Biography:

Mari Berner is a Senior Administration Officer at the North-West University's Technology Transfer & Innovation Support Office, where she manages intellectual property administration, royalty distribution, and IP reporting. She holds a BCom in Econometrics from the University of Pretoria, a Postgraduate Diploma in Management (NQF 8), and a Data Analytics certificate from UCT. With over 15 years' experience in financial and university administration, she combines expertise in finance, data analysis, and technology transfer. Mari is passionate about intellectual property management, innovation support, and leveraging data to enhance institutional effectiveness.

This poster explores the strategic role of integrated intellectual property (IP) management dashboards in strengthening institutional IP management and research commercialisation strategies. Universities and public research organisations are under increasing pressure to demonstrate effective stewardship of IP while translating research outputs into tangible socio-economic impact. However, IP and commercialisation data are often fragmented across research offices, technology transfer units, and senior management structures, limiting their value for strategic decision-making.

The poster will present a structured overview of how key IP, innovation, and commercialisation indicators can be consolidated into a coherent, decision-oriented dashboard that supports management across the full research and innovation lifecycle. It will cover the selection and categorisation of metrics such as invention disclosures, patent filings and progression, portfolio health, licensing and spin-out activity, industry engagement, revenue generation, and downstream impact indicators. Particular attention is given to the use of trend analysis, thresholds, and visual cues to enable early identification of risks, opportunities, and priority interventions.

The poster further demonstrates how IP dashboards can be aligned with institutional research strategies and commercialisation objectives, ensuring that IP decisions are informed by research strengths, market readiness, and resource constraints. By providing real-time or regularly updated insights, dashboards enable leadership to move from reactive, compliance-driven IP management toward proactive portfolio steering and evidence-based investment decisions.

The contribution of this poster lies in offering a practical and transferable framework for integrating IP data into management decision processes. It illustrates how dashboards can enhance transparency, accountability, and cross-functional communication between research management, technology transfer offices, and executive leadership. Ultimately, the poster shows how well-designed IP management dashboards can strengthen commercialisation strategies, improve portfolio outcomes, and support the delivery of sustainable societal and economic impact from publicly funded research.

— Collaboration not a natural act: Challenges and strategies for partnership in interdisciplinary education and research

Mr Harry Maishe Bopape¹

¹University of South Africa (UNISA), Rooihuiskraal, South Africa

Biography:

Harry Maishe Bopape is a Director of Research Support at UNISA, where his major role is implementing the research strategy. He holds degrees in Physics and Mathematics. Completed a postgraduate Diploma in Datametrics, majoring in Information Technology and Decision Modeling. Holds a diploma in Strategy Execution from Harvard Business School and a Master's in business leadership in Strategic Management. Has over 27 years in academia, 7 years in middle management, and 13 years in Senior Management as a director.

Non-Executive Director of the EthiXPERT Board of Directors, responsible for pinpointing growth drivers that will help EthiXPERT to grow.

Interdisciplinary education and research are widely promoted as essential for addressing complex “wicked problems” such as climate resilience and digital equity. Yet collaboration rarely emerges organically, despite strong institutional mandates and policy encouragement. Disciplinary silos characterized by divergent languages, epistemologies, methodologies, incentive structures, and power asymmetries often create friction that fragments partnerships and limits the potential of interdisciplinary initiatives. The most effective collaborations are not those that attempt to erase disciplinary differences, but those that intentionally harness them as sources of intellectual strength and innovation.

This presentation examines the structural, cognitive, and institutional barriers that impede meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education. Drawing on interdisciplinary project case studies and theories of collaborative learning, it demonstrates how unaddressed epistemic divides can result in parallel efforts, stalled innovation, and inequitable research outcomes. The presentation also introduces the African–European Consortia framework, an approach designed to move interdisciplinary collaboration beyond aspirational rhetoric toward deliberately engineered ecosystems that support equitable and productive partnerships.

For research administrators and institutional leaders, the presentation offers practical strategies and tools for fostering sustainable, high-impact collaborations. By reframing partnership as a deliberate and supported practice rather than a natural occurrence, the presentation contributes to reimagining how universities design and sustain interdisciplinary engagement in an era of global complexity.

— From funding to strategic partnership: Horizon Europe and Africa IV Initiative for resilient AU–EU collaboration

Mr Jonathan Brookes¹

¹Horizon Europe (EU Funding) Specialist, Kampala, Uganda

Biography:

Jon Brookes is a Senior Consultant specialising in EU Funding and R&I Policy. With extensive experience in Horizon Europe, he has led UK National Contact Point services for UKRI in the UK and help shape UK engagement with EU funding frameworks. A strategic thinker and skilled partnership builder, Jon has worked in Brussels and the UK, fostering collaboration between governments, universities and international networks. He holds degrees from the University of York and the University of Warwick. Jon is now based in Kampala, aiming to build capacity and understanding of EU funding opportunities and partnerships for African organisations.

As global funding landscapes become increasingly volatile and donor priorities shift, institutions across Africa are seeking resilient, diversified, and strategic research partnerships. European Research & Innovation (R&I) funding — particularly under Horizon Europe — represents a renewed and significant opportunity for African institutions to reposition themselves within high-value, long-term global collaborations.

This presentation explores how Horizon Europe is evolving from a traditional funding programme into a platform for strategic global partnership-building. With its strong emphasis on excellence, impact, capacity strengthening, and international cooperation, Horizon Europe offers structured mechanisms for equitable collaboration, co-creation, and sustainable research ecosystems. Unlike short-cycle donor models, European R&I frameworks incentivise durable consortia, institutional integration, and policy-aligned innovation pathways.

Particular attention will be given to the Africa Initiative IV (Africa IV) under Horizon Europe, which signals a deepening commitment to bi-regional cooperation. Africa IV moves beyond transactional funding relationships towards strategic alignment with the AU–EU Innovation Agenda, encouraging African leadership within consortia, strengthening research management capacity, and embedding long-term governance and partnership structures. It provides a timely entry point for institutions seeking to diversify funding portfolios while embedding themselves in influential transnational networks.

The session will examine how African research and innovation managers can leverage Horizon Europe not only as a funding source, but as a diplomatic, institutional, and capacity-building instrument. We will discuss practical considerations including consortium positioning, partnership negotiation, governance frameworks, and sustainability planning in an environment of uncertainty.

By reframing European R&I funding as a strategic collaboration architecture rather than simply a grant mechanism, this presentation highlights how Africa–Europe cooperation can underpin resilient, equitable, and globally competitive research ecosystems.

— Advancing equitable knowledge partnerships_ reimagining strategic collaboration

Ms Samantha Linn Coert¹

¹Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa, ²Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria West, South Africa

Biography:

Samantha Coert is a Strategic Partnerships and Internationalisation Officer at the Human Sciences Research Council, with over 15 years' experience in higher education and government research systems. She holds an Honours in Psychology and a Master's from the University of the Western Cape. Her expertise spans research development, grants management, and strategic partnership coordination. Samantha serves on several funding and policy forums, including committees linked to the National Innovation System. She is actively engaged in regional and international science policy networks supporting collaborative research and innovation.

This presentation examines how institutional partnerships can move beyond transactional memoranda of understanding toward equitable, impact-driven collaboration. Using the strategic partnership between the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) as a case study, the session will demonstrate governance, agenda-setting, and capacity-building models that enable joint decision-making, shared intellectual property, diversified funding portfolios, and measurable development impact.

The presentation will contribute to the session by offering a practical framework for embedding equity, accountability, and mutual benefit into institutional agreements. Participants will gain concrete tools—including steering committee models, co-designed research calls, reciprocal fellowships, and accountability dashboards—to strengthen grant competitiveness and build sustainable, co-owned knowledge partnerships within national and global research ecosystems.

The presentation offers practical tools and institutional mechanisms that research managers can adapt to build sustainable, inclusive, and impact-oriented collaboration models within the African research ecosystem.

— Beyond consent: Ethical and accountable biobanking

Mrs Tanya Coetzee¹, Mr Rhulani Mkansi¹, Prof Safia Mohamed², Ms Eleni Flack-Davison¹, Prof Ames Dhai¹

¹University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, ²University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Tanya Coetzee is a bioethicist and is a part of the secretariat of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) and the Biobanks Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand. She has extensive experience in research ethics review and is a strong advocate for the importance of local context within the research ethics landscape. Tanya is an active member of the Community of Practice for Research Ethics and Integrity professionals under the auspices of SARIMA and has received international recognition as a Research Management Professional.

Too often in research management, biobanks, biorepositories, and “freezer farms” are spoken of as if they were the same, but the distinctions between them reveal very different models of science, stewardship, and accountability. The collection and storage of human biological materials (HBMs) and associated data must always comply with ethical and legal requirements, particularly the key instrument of informed consent. Responsibility for storing samples in the correct facilities requires both technical knowledge and accountability. Biobanks are not merely places where samples are stored; they are living infrastructures of discovery that fuel the next generation of biomedical innovation and should be in good standing and be accredited. Their governance, from establishment through to closure, should be grounded in transparency, accountability and compliance with ethical and legal frameworks.

In South Africa, the absence of comprehensive regulatory guidance for biobanks heightens concerns about inconsistent oversight, variable governance standards, and the potential misuse of HBMs. The call for a governance framework is not new. The rise of POPIA and the GDPR has transformed biobanking from simply storing biospecimens to safeguarding the sensitive data that travels with them. These include clear purpose specification, stringent security measures, data subject participation rights, and defined retention and deletion protocols.

Commercial biobanks offer South Africa unprecedented access to large-scale data and global research partnerships. However, opportunity without regulation invites uncertainty. Without a clear governance framework, concerns regarding oversight, ethical use, and the stewardship of human biological materials and their associated data will persist. Developing robust governance structures is therefore essential to protect donors, maintain public trust, and ensure that biobanking drives responsible and impactful health research locally and globally.

— Reimagining Research Support through Strategic Partnerships between the Research Office and Library Services

Ms Ronel De Swardt¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Ronel de Swardt has worked in Research Management for over a decade and serves as a Senior Coordinator in the Research Support Services cluster at the University of Cape Town. Ronel's core responsibilities include project managing statutory reporting to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for both Research Outputs and Creative Research Outputs. She has extensive experience supporting institutional research reporting processes and strengthening research support systems. In 2024, Ronel was awarded the Research Management Professional (RMP) designation, recognising her expertise and contribution to the field of research management.

In a resource constrained and rapidly evolving research environment, institutions are increasingly required to optimise existing internal partnerships to strengthen researcher support. This presentation showcases a practical and effective collaboration between the Research Office and Library Services at our institution, demonstrating how reimagining internal relationships can enhance research management capacity, improve service delivery, and support institutional research outputs without requiring new structures or additional funding.

Over several years, the Research Office has worked closely with Library colleagues to support researchers navigating open access publishing, funding options, compliance requirements, and digital scholarship platforms. When researchers are unable to utilise the Library's Transformative Agreements, the Research Office identifies alternative support through the available APC fund, ensuring that equitable publishing opportunities remain available. The two units collaborate seamlessly by referring researchers to one another, co-assisting on queries, and maintaining a shared understanding of available publishing pathways.

Library Services has provided targeted training to the Research Office on the Transformative Agreements webpage, enabling staff to guide researchers directly and efficiently. Their support in securing accurate DOIs has strengthened the Research Office's DHET subsidy submissions, resulting in successful claims that may otherwise have been rejected. The collaboration has further expanded into joint capacity building, with the Library training staff on ZivaHub (Figshare) to support researchers needing persistent URLs for creative and non-traditional outputs. Additionally, the Library's continuous sharing of open access resources and webinars has contributed to ongoing professional development for the Research Office team.

This case study demonstrates how leveraging "what is already in our backyard" can create a more resilient, interconnected, and impactful research support ecosystem. It offers a replicable model for institutions seeking to strengthen internal partnerships, enhance service integration, and support researchers holistically through coordinated, cross-unit collaboration.

— Building digital transformation in research and innovation management: Using enterprise system approach in African HEIs

Mr Don Distasio¹, Mrs. Nacole Simonds¹, Mrs. Maricel Van Rooyen²

¹InfoEd Global, Albany, United States, ²University of Free State, South Africa

Biography:

Don Distasio is the Manager of Implementations and Technical Consulting at InfoEd Global. Don started with InfoEd in 2015 as an Application Analyst managing client accounts as a member of the Client Services team. Soon after, Don began supporting various implementation and integration projects for an array of clients located in the New York City Tri-State area and then branched out to other US and International clients in subsequent years. Don now mentors a team of implementations analysts and remains the lead representation on several current implementation, integration, and support projects.

The accelerating pace of digital transformation is reshaping how universities and research institutions manage the research and innovation lifecycle. Yet across the African research ecosystem, many institutions continue to operate with fragmented systems, manual administrative processes, limited data visibility, and uneven technical capacity factors that constrain efficiency, transparency, and strategic decision-making. Digital transformation has therefore become essential for enabling resilient and future ready research and innovation management.

Fragmented and paper based systems often lead to faculty frustration and hinder the consolidation of information into a single, reportable platform. This creates significant challenges for workflow optimization, research visibility, and compliance with institutional policies. Implementing an enterprise research administration system can therefore feel complex and overwhelming, particularly when strategic alignment, leadership support, and stakeholder coordination are limited.

This session will provide a deep dive into best practices for implementing an enterprise software solution, with a focus on promoting user adoption, streamlining rollout, and establishing a sustainable foundation for long-term success. It will present a pragmatic, institution centered approach to strengthening digital capabilities through an integrated Research Management System (RMS) such as InfoEd. Drawing on practical implementation experience, the session will demonstrate how digital platforms can streamline proposal development, ethics and compliance workflows, contract and grant management, reporting, research outputs tracking, and institutional performance analytics.

In partnership with InfoEd, this will illustrate how digital systems can shift research offices from administrative burden to strategic enablers improving data quality, enhancing compliance, strengthening cross departmental collaboration, and supporting evidence based decision making. Scalable models for institutions at different levels of digital maturity will also be showcased, together with lessons learned from implementation challenges and user adoption barriers. This presentation positions digital transformation as a capacity building journey that delivers more efficient operations and a stronger foundation for impact led research and innovation management across Africa.

— Reimagining faculty research administration for resilient and inclusive research management systems

Mr Siviwe Feketshane¹

¹University of Zululand, Empangeni, South Africa

Biography:

Mr. Siviwe Feketshane is the Faculty of Education Research Administrator at the University of Zululand, leading faculty-level research governance. He serves as Secretariat to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and Faculty Research Ethics Committee, overseeing research coordination, quality assurance, compliance, and output management. A member of the Eastern Region Community of Practice on Research Ethics & Integrity for SARIMA, Siviwe is passionate about research management and ethics in higher education. In his presentation, “Reimagining Faculty Research Administration for Resilient and Inclusive Research Management Systems,” he outlines frameworks promoting accountability, resilience, and inclusive research excellence.

As institutions seek to build resilient and impactful research ecosystems, the role of faculty research administrators has become increasingly vital. However, structural and operational gaps between faculty-level implementation and institutional research governance continue to undermine efficiency, compliance, and inclusivity. This paper examines the evolving role of faculty research administrators and highlights systemic challenges that limit alignment, agility, and institutional impact. Faculty research administrators often operate with limited exposure to institutional policies, regulatory frameworks, and strategic priorities. This disconnect, results in inconsistent policy interpretation, procedural delays, and compliance risks, ultimately affecting researcher experience and institutional accountability.

Many administrators assume research management responsibilities without formal training in research governance, grant administration, ethics review processes, research outputs, or higher degree management. The absence of structured capacity-building pathways constrains confidence, efficiency, and quality assurance, while limiting professional growth. Similarly, members of Faculty Higher Degrees and Research Ethics Committees require continuous development to ensure rigor, fairness, and timely decision-making. Gaps in methodological evaluation, ethics oversight, and regulatory awareness can compromise review quality and turnaround times, directly impacting research productivity and institutional inclusion.

A persistent misalignment between institutional frameworks and faculty-level operations leads to duplication of effort, inconsistent documentation, fragmented digital systems, and increased administrative burden for researchers. This fragmentation weakens institutional coherence and system resilience.

Building resilient research management systems requires harmonized procedures, co-developed policy guidelines, joint capacity-building initiatives, and interoperable digital platforms that integrate faculty and central research workflows. Such integration enhances transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation across the research lifecycle.

Reimagining faculty research administration is therefore a strategic imperative. Investing in professional development, policy literacy, and system integration will bridge faculty-institutional divides and strengthen governance. By aligning people, processes, and platforms, institutions can create agile, coherent, and inclusive research management systems capable of delivering meaningful impact in a complex global environment

— Unlocking value from data intensive research

Mrs Mercia Fynn¹

¹Adams & Adams, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Joanne is a patent attorney and partner with more than 15 years of experience, heading up the life sciences practice at Adams & Adams. Her approach to advising clients is to consider holistically commercial and IP aspects clients' businesses. Her expertise extends to patent and PBR filing and prosecution; patent searching and freedom-to-operate assessments; IP commercial transactional advice, due diligence assistance, and IP-related regulatory advice. Her clients range from leading international companies with global operations to start-ups. Joanne is a leading IP lawyer recognised by Chambers & Partners, IAM Global Leaders, Patent 1000, MIP IP Stars, and The Legal 500.

Data-intensive research is reshaping how universities and science councils generate, protect, and commercialise intellectual assets. In domains such as life sciences, bioinformatics, AI/ML, and digital health, the greatest value often lies not only in patents but in the interplay between datasets, computational models, software, pipelines, know-how, and institutional reputation. Traditional patent-led strategies can therefore miss key opportunities—or unintentionally leak value. This session outlines a practical framework for integrated IP management that aligns patenting, data governance, software copyright, database rights, trade secret strategy, and brand building into a coherent institutional approach.

We will explore how to decide when to patent and when to rely on trade secret protection, particularly for algorithms, data pipelines, and proprietary analytical workflows that lose value if disclosed. We'll look at methods for ring-fencing datasets through licensing terms, access controls, provenance documentation, and management of derivative works and improvement. We also address how to structure protection around code and models, using copyright, database rights, and contractual restrictions to ensure downstream commercial uses flow back to the institution.

Beyond protection, the session covers commercial models suited to data-rich outputs: sublicensing, research-use vs commercial-use tiering, and structuring long-term access rights for partners and spinouts.

Because data-intensive research often touches human subjects, we also examine the ethical and regulatory foundations needed in Africa, including consent alignment, community engagement, and data-sovereignty localisation.

Attendees will leave with insights into integrating IP, privacy, ethics, and commercial strategy to build durable, licensable assets from data-enabled research.

— Enabling research impact through resilient multi-funder grant administration

Mrs Heide Goedhals¹

¹North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Biography:

Mrs Heide Goedhals is a Senior Research Support Officer in the Research and Postgraduate Support Office at North-West University, with more than 11 years of experience in research administration. In her current role, she provides support to researchers across the pre- and post-award funding lifecycle, including identifying funding opportunities, coordinating grant submissions, and ensuring compliance with funder and institutional requirements. She works closely with academics to facilitate successful funding applications and effective grant management, contributing to the advancement of research and postgraduate support at the university.

Research managers play a critical yet often invisible role in enabling research impact by ensuring that funding pathways, partnerships, and compliance processes function reliably. As collaborative and jointly funded grants become more common, administrative complexity increases, and small coordination gaps can disrupt funding flows, delay projects, and undermine intended societal benefits.

This presentation shares a reflective case study from a South African university involving a joint NRF–international funder application that required parallel submissions to two funding bodies. While the international partner confirmed receipt, the South African submission was inadvertently not completed. The omission was only identified three months later during follow-up communication, placing funding approval, researcher timelines, and project delivery at risk. For affected researchers and students, this threatened salaries, milestones, and planned outputs.

Recognising that research impact depends on dependable administrative systems, the research office conducted a structured review to identify process vulnerabilities. Process mapping, stakeholder consultation, and workflow analysis revealed gaps in tracking, verification, and cross-funder coordination. In response, practical measures were introduced, including centralised submission trackers, dual-verification checkpoints, pre-deadline checklists, cross-funder confirmations, and standard operating procedures for complex calls.

These interventions strengthened accountability, improved visibility across teams, and reduced submission risk in subsequent funding cycles. Beyond resolving the immediate issue, the changes enhanced confidence among researchers and protected the continuity of funded activities.

The case demonstrates how proactive research management practices enable impact by safeguarding funding reliability and strengthening partnerships. By sharing lessons learned and transferable tools, this presentation offers actionable strategies for research managers seeking to build robust administrative pathways that ensure research funding translates into meaningful and measurable outcomes.

— Understanding indigenous autoethnography in research ethics: The role of research managers

Ms Moore Hutamo¹

¹University of the Western Cape, Bellville South, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Ms. Moore Kgothatso Desiree Hutamo holds a Master's degree in Development Planning and Management from the University of Limpopo and is currently pursuing her PhD at the same institution. She began her career with an internship at the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA). She later worked as a Research Fieldworker at the Health Economics and Epidemiology Research Office (HE²RO) and as a Research Assistant in Ethics at the University of Limpopo. She currently serves as an Officer: Research Ethics at the University of the Western Cape, where she promotes research integrity and ethical research practices.

Indigenous Autoethnography research has gained increasing recognition in qualitative research. Although study centers around the lived experiences within the social and cultural context of the researcher, the methodological complexities raise a number of ethics concerns. Which are related to informed consent, confidentiality, emotional vulnerability and potential harm. Despite the growth, deeper scholarly examination is required on how the ethical principles can be applied and adapted in this type of research. Therefore, the aim of the study is to enhance Research Managers' understanding of the complexities in indigenous autoethnographic research and the ways research ethical principles can be adapted to accommodate such research studies. The study employed the qualitative research approach, where content analysis was used to examine and interpret existing literature published between 2022 – 2025. The findings indicate that indigenous autoethnographic research is grounded by indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and traditional storytelling, which often is unconventional. Reviewed literature highlights that it is important to understand and consider indigenous practices and knowledge when reviewing this type of study. Furthermore, it demonstrates unique ethical considerations or principles that challenges conventional ethics principles and processes. The ethical review processes rely more on western principles that involve informed consent, anonymity and potential harm etc. Which then results in rigid ethics procedures that do not potentially accommodate indigenous autoethnographic research. Therefore, it is the important for Research Managers to understand indigenous autoethnographic research methods and to ensure flexible ethical review processes to support indigenous-led research. This approach will ensure that these types of researches are accommodate during the review process.

— Revealing hidden researchers: Leveraging USDP and UCDP to elevate professional staff visibility

Mr Katlego Kekae¹

¹University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Gerald Katlego Kekae is a higher education programme and grant management professional with over ten years of experience in research capacity development and university programme coordination. He currently serves as a Research Grant Coordinator at the University of Pretoria, where he supports the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of national initiatives such as the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP). In this role, he works closely with national and international partners to strengthen research development and doctoral training within South Africa's higher education sector, contributing to initiatives aimed at enhancing institutional capacity and advancing academic staff development across universities.

Professional staff are increasingly engaging in research at South African universities, yet their contributions remain largely invisible within institutional research communication, reporting, and innovation portfolios. This study examines the University of Pretoria (UP) to identify which categories of professional staff are research-active, why they conduct research despite it not being part of their Key Performance Areas (KPA's), and the types of research they produce.

Institutional research output records show that research-active professional staff are spread across libraries, laboratories, research management units, IT and data analytics, student support, and technical departments. Their research includes applied and practice-based studies, discipline-specific work, and collaborative projects with academics. Motivations for conducting research include postgraduate study requirements, professional development, intellectual curiosity, improved evidence-based practice, and the desire to contribute to institutional knowledge production.

A central focus of this study is the importance of leveraging national programmes specifically the University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP) and the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) which offer professional staff access to doctoral funding, structured support, and capacity-building opportunities. Increased professional staff participation in these programmes strengthens doctoral output, enhances institutional research visibility, and contributes to national development targets.

Aligned with the conference theme, the study highlights digital platforms, multilingual communication, open science, and storytelling as strategies for increasing the visibility of professional staff research. Advocacy for the USDP is emphasised to encourage broader participation and to expand institutional research and innovation portfolios.

— Building digital capacity for effective research and innovation management in data-driven institutional ecosystems

Ms Sharifa Kiranda¹

¹Makerere University School of Public Health, Kampala, Uganda

Biography:

Ms. Sharifa Kiranda is the Grants Assistant at Makerere University School of Public Health, where she supports the effective management of the School's research portfolio. She plays a key role in maintaining the grants database, identifying and sharing funding opportunities, processing institutional support letters, and providing coordination for the School's Seed Grants Programme. Her responsibilities span both pre- and post-award activities, contributing to strengthened grants administration and research support systems at MakSPH. She is passionate about advancing research management practices and promoting efficient systems that enable researchers to secure funding and contribute to evidence-based solutions for public health challenges.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies is transforming how research and innovation are planned, managed and evaluated across institutions. As research environments become increasingly data-driven, research managers play a critical role in facilitating the effective integration of digital tools and systems that support efficient research administration, collaboration and impact tracking. However, many institutions continue to face capacity gaps in digital readiness, including limited technical skills, fragmented digital infrastructure and inadequate governance frameworks to guide digital transformation in research management.

This abstract examines practical strategies for strengthening digital capacity within research and innovation management systems. It explores how targeted skills development, institutional digital readiness and structured governance frameworks can enable research managers to effectively navigate the evolving digital landscape. Particular attention is given to the development of digital competencies among research administrators, including data management, digital communication platforms, research information systems and the use of analytics for evidence-based decision-making.

It further discusses the role of institutional leadership in supporting digital transformation through the establishment of clear policies, investment in digital infrastructure and the promotion of collaborative digital ecosystems that enhance transparency and efficiency in research processes. Strengthening governance frameworks is also highlighted as a key component in ensuring ethical data use, regulatory compliance and sustainable digital innovation in research management.

Drawing on emerging practices in research administration, the study proposes a capacity-building framework that integrates training, policy development and digital systems adoption. Such an approach enables research managers to lead institutional transformation while improving coordination, accountability and knowledge sharing across research units.

By strengthening digital capacity within research management structures, institutions can enhance their ability to respond to evolving research demands, improve operational efficiency and maximize the societal impact of research and innovation initiatives.

— Cultivating collaborative relationships: Insights from an indigenous knowledge system project at a selected university

Mr Njabulo Kubheka¹, Dr Thembinkosi Maphosa¹

¹University of The Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town, South Africa, ²University of The Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Njabulo Kubheka has been with the University of the Western Cape for over 5 years working in the Technology Transfer Office, with one of his responsibilities in the office aligned to Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS).

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Thembinkosi Maphosa is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of the Western Cape Technology Transfer Office whose special interest, amongst other responsibilities, is to find out how social innovation projects can be socio-financial sustainable.

Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) increasingly advocate for mutually beneficial partnerships between universities, communities, government, and industry in the commercialisation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). However, despite this “win-win” aspiration, disputes over intellectual property ownership, royalty allocation, and benefit sharing frequently emerge. These conflicts often stem from ambiguous agreements and inadequate compliance mechanisms, resulting in strained relationships and weakened commercialisation outcomes. While existing scholarship recognises the importance of ethical engagement and equitable benefit sharing in IKS projects, there remains limited operational guidance on how documentation and governance processes should be structured across the project lifecycle to minimise disputes.

This study addresses this gap by developing a systematic pre-during-post project framework to guide documentation, compliance, and stakeholder alignment in IKS commercialisation. Drawing on lessons from the XXXX case, the research examines how clearly defined verbal and written agreements established before, monitored during, and enforced after project implementation can reduce conflict and enhance transparency. The study adopts a qualitative methodology based on practical stakeholder engagement and document analysis of agreements, memoranda of understanding, and benefit-sharing arrangements associated with the case.

The findings propose a structured engagement and documentation model that strengthens accountability and clarifies roles, ownership, and royalty distribution. Practically, the framework provides TTOs and policymakers with an implementable governance roadmap to support equitable partnerships, reduce disputes, and improve sustainable commercialisation strategies in Indigenous knowledge systems projects.

— The role of the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee in enabling research for impact

Mrs Chrissy Mandere¹, Associate Professor Victoria Ndolo¹

¹University of Malawi, Zomba, Malawi

Biography:

Chrissy Kamwangala Mandere (Mrs) is the Administrator of the University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) at the University of Malawi (UNIMA). She holds a Master of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in Human Resource Management from UNIMA, and a Certificate in Research Ethics and Integrity from University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. She attended several trainings in research management through the SARIMA Breccia Project and University of Pretoria. Currently a PhD student in Public Administration at UNIMA, she has over 24 years of experience at UNIMA, manages daily operations of UNIMAREC and provides technical and advisory support to researchers.

The University of Malawi Research Ethics Committee (UNIMAREC) is an independent institutional committee established in 2019. Its core mandate is to protect research participants by ensuring their safety, dignity, and rights are prioritized. Operating under the regulatory oversight of the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST), UNIMAREC is authorized to review and approve research protocols submitted by university staff, students, affiliates, and collaborators. Since its inception, UNIMAREC has experienced substantial growth in protocol submissions. Between 2020 and 2021, submissions increased from 34 to 67, a 97% rise. This upward trend accelerated dramatically between 2021 and 2025, with submissions surging from 67 to 170, a 153% increase. This growth is partly attributed to targeted training initiatives. Following the first training in 2021, the number of undergraduate departments submitting protocols rose from just 2 that year to 6 in both 2024 and 2025. Annual awareness workshops, engaging heads of departments, postgraduate coordinators, and selected members, have further emphasized the importance of ethical review.

Despite this progress, several challenges persist. These include critiques regarding reviewers commenting on scientific aspects, resistance from staff and postgraduate students to pay processing fees, and requests for retrospective approvals. Other obstacles involve misunderstanding the 10% operational costs, some supervisors discouraging protocol submission, and difficulty adhering to UNIMAREC's prescribed format.

Positive feedback from researchers indicates that the review process strengthens study design and enhances potential impact. In addition, UNIMAREC has observed improved field compliance by the researcher in the field during inspection. The overall trend affirms UNIMAREC's growing role in enabling impactful research underscoring the committee's vital contribution to ethical research conduct.

— Illuminating impact: Showcasing the research and innovation portfolio at Nelson Mandela University

Ms Elizabeth Maghubu¹, Ms Yondela Mwanda¹

¹Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa

Biography:

Elizabeth is a research professional at Nelson Mandela University with a background in Social Anthropology. She began her career at the University of the Witwatersrand, working on the Birth to Twenty longitudinal study, where her research focused on teenage pregnancy and young fatherhood. She later worked in market research with Submarine Depth Research and in the development sector with ActionAid International. Since joining Nelson Mandela University in 2017, she has held roles supporting research ethics, academic administration, and research management. She currently works in Research Support and Management, contributing to research outputs processes, including conference proceedings and institutional research visibility.

Universities increasingly face the challenge of ensuring that their research and innovation activities are visible, accessible, and demonstrably impactful. Creating visibility for the institutional research and innovation portfolio is therefore essential for strengthening strategic positioning, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and demonstrating the value of academic knowledge to society. This presentation explores how research offices can play a pivotal role in enabling this visibility by systematically mapping research strengths, highlighting innovation outputs, and communicating the pathways through which research contributes to societal, economic, and policy impact.

Within the context of Nelson Mandela University, the need to align institutional research activities with national priorities set by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) is increasingly important. By developing structured mechanisms for documenting and showcasing research outputs, partnerships, and impact pathways, the university can strengthen accountability, attract funding opportunities, and support collaborative networks across academia, government, industry, and communities.

The presentation further considers how strategic partnerships, targeted knowledge translation, and improved impact measurement frameworks can enhance the visibility of research beyond traditional academic outputs. Emphasis is placed on moving beyond publication metrics to highlight real-world contributions, including policy influence, community engagement, innovation uptake, and capacity development.

Ultimately, creating visibility for the institutional research and innovation portfolio supports a more integrated and strategic approach to research management. By aligning research communication, partnership development, and impact evaluation, the Research Office at Nelson Mandela University can position the institution as a leader in socially responsive, impact-driven, and globally relevant scholarship.

— Indigenous research ethics and community participation in advancing inclusive development

Mr Qolane Mashaba¹, Ms Finhlo Mightiness Shilowe¹, Mrs Tukiso Sewapa¹, Mr Nyiko Machavi¹, Mr Thembinkosi Mabila¹, Mr Travor Magonyane¹

¹University of Limpopo, Polokwane, South Africa

Biography:

Qolane Mashaba is a Research assistant under the Ethics division in the University of Limpopo, South Africa. He holds a bachelor's degree in public administration, Honours in Public Administration and He is currently pursuing a master's degree in public administration. His area of interest in research is on governance ethics and active community participation in research innovation.

This study examines the significance of indigenous research ethics and the value of community response in advancing inclusive development. Historically, indigenous communities have been marginalised by adoption of extractive practices which undermine the local perspectives. This paper argues that in order to advance inclusive research growth, it is essential to comprehend the significance of Indigenous research ethics and community, as this guarantees that the Indigenous communities are respected, actively participated, and empowered throughout the research process.

This paper adopted the conceptual approach that dealt with a critical analysis of the existing literature on Indigenous research ethics, community participation, and inclusive development. The adoption of this approach aims at using existing literature to argue that valuable research ethics and indigenous community are interconnected. The paper also highlights that the involvement of communities in the advancement of research ethics creates an environment that gives room to accountability, trust, and legitimacy in research and development initiatives.

The findings of this paper highlighted that the results show that community involvement is essential to guaranteeing inclusive development results. This paper concluded that active community involvement combined with the use of indigenous research ethics can enhance research methodology and guarantee that it benefits the communities.

— Bridging funded research and postgraduate throughput: A systems integration approach

Mr Mpho Mashamba¹, Mr Katleho Nyaile¹

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Mpho Mashamba is a research development professional at the University of the Free State (UFS). He holds a Master of Laws, an Honors degree in Criminology and a BSocSc degree specialising in Psychology, Industrial Psychology, Sociology and Criminology from UFS. With an interest in digitisation within Higher Education, His focus is on integrating research systems, improving grant application processes, and developing governance processes to improve the visibility of research support offices. With experience from various industries (Agriculture and Education), he aims to strengthen research ecosystems, advance equity, and position research development as a key driver of institutional research impact.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Mr. Katleho Nyaile serves as a Senior Officer at the Center for Graduate Support at the University of the Free State. He possesses a master's degree by research in Psychology. His responsibilities include overseeing the postgraduate student tracking portfolio and actively contributing to the development and management of the Graduate Research Management (GRM) system from its initiation to the present day. The GRM system was introduced as an online tool to monitor the progress of postgraduate students from enrollment through to graduation. Mr. Nyaile oversees all aspects related to GRM, its development, and collaborates with all seven faculties at UFS.

Using the InfoEd Research Information Management System (RIMS), the University of the Free State (UFS) captures proposals, sponsorships and industry partnerships. At the same time, the institution utilises the Graduate Research Management (GRM) system for the purpose of tracking and monitoring Masters and Doctoral students with an emphasis on supervision, student progress, funding and time to completion. Although complimentary, these platforms function in isolation of each other, thereby limiting the ability to demonstrate how sponsored research translates into postgraduate throughput as an impactful research output.

This paper proposes an integration model of RIMS and GRM that administratively links sponsored supervisor-led projects with eligible Masters and Doctoral students, aligned with their qualification and bursary provisions. The model proposes a system-to-system Application Programming Interface (API) that leverages interoperable data, such as project identifiers (funders, funding codes, supervisor ID, deliverables), qualification level and completion requirements. It also proposes a governance layer that incorporates system security protocols, data policy & integrity, institutional accountability, and audit trails to ensure compliance.

In practice, the model (1) Matches Masters and Doctoral students to sponsored projects with embedded bursary components; (2) Monitors student participation across the research projects lifecycle; and (3) Measures Masters and Doctoral throughput as attributable outputs of funded research activity. This model enables institutions to expand parameters of performance reporting beyond traditional outputs such as journal articles, book chapters, books, conference contributions and creative outputs. The model also reinforces evidence-based decision making, augments funding optimisation, and support transparent reporting.

In conclusion, the model advances equitable access to postgraduate education and reinforces institutional system maturity and strategic governance in digitally enabled research, yet resource constrained, environment. The model does so while remaining aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 16 (Peace, justice, and Strong Institutions).

— Accelerating research with AI: Practical tools for the modern researcher

Mr Nkanyiso Sigwaza², Ms Naledi Tlhakudi², Dr Natalie Raphil², Mr Abe Mathopa¹

¹University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, ²Women in AI, Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Nkanyiso Sigwaza is a Business Intelligence Analyst and AI practitioner with a background in analytics and data-driven decision-making. He holds a Bachelor of Business Science Honours in Analytics from the University of Cape Town. Nkanyiso is actively involved in advancing AI literacy and inclusive innovation through his work with Women in AI South Africa, where he contributes to education initiatives that help promote practical AI adoption.

Introduction

The exponential growth of academic literature, data sources, and digital resources has made it increasingly difficult for researchers to efficiently review, synthesize, and generate new knowledge. At the same time, recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) offer new opportunities to support researchers throughout the research lifecycle. However, many researchers remain unfamiliar with practical ways to integrate AI tools into their everyday research workflows. Building capacity for effective and responsible use of these tools is therefore becoming an important component of digital transformation within research and innovation management.

Benefits and AI Tools

This presentation explores how accessible AI-powered tools can support key stages of the research process, including literature exploration, document analysis, knowledge synthesis, and research ideation. Using practical examples, the session will demonstrate how tools such as NotebookLM, ChatGPT, and Elicit can assist researchers in analysing collections of academic papers, identifying emerging themes across documents, summarising complex materials, and generating structured insights that support research development.

Drawing on experiences from community-led AI literacy initiatives, including programmes organised through Women in AI, the presentation will highlight how professional communities and organisations can play a key role in supporting researchers in adopting AI tools. Through targeted workshops, demonstrations, and collaborative learning environments, such initiatives can help researchers build confidence in using emerging technologies while promoting responsible and ethical engagement with AI. This includes guiding researchers on how to collaborate with AI responsibly, using these tools to support thinking and analysis rather than simply copying and pasting generated outputs

Conclusion

By showcasing practical workflows and real-world applications, this presentation aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on digital transformation in research ecosystems by illustrating scalable approaches to building AI literacy and empowering researchers to navigate increasingly complex information environments.

— Reimagining postgraduate funding to advance equity, throughput and research capacity

Dr Priscilla Mensah¹, Dr Kwezi Mzilikazi²

¹Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, ²Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Priscilla Mensah is Director for Research Development at Nelson Mandela University, where she leads initiatives to strengthen postgraduate education, research capacity, and innovation. She plays a strategic role in national and international partnerships. Her work focuses on enabling emerging researchers, advancing transdisciplinary collaboration, and aligning institutional research with national development priorities.

Across Africa, universities are under increasing pressure to strengthen research capacity, accelerate doctoral production, and address persistent inequalities in access to postgraduate education. Funding models play a critical role in shaping these outcomes. In recent years, several South African universities have begun redesigning institutional postgraduate funding frameworks in response to national policy shifts, changing funding landscapes, and the need for more inclusive research systems.

This presentation examines the transformation of postgraduate funding models at Nelson Mandela University and Rhodes University as institutional case studies. Both institutions revised their scholarship frameworks to align more closely with emerging national funding principles that prioritise full-time postgraduate study, equity of access, and improved progression through the research training pipeline.

At Nelson Mandela University, the introduction of the Postgraduate Research Scholarships (PGRS) framework incorporated funding categories such as Full Cost of Study and Partial Cost of Study, prioritisation of financially needy students, and guaranteed progression support from honours to doctoral level for qualifying candidates. Similarly, Rhodes University implemented revised postgraduate funding mechanisms designed to strengthen doctoral pathways and support emerging researchers.

Drawing on institutional policy reforms and early implementation experiences, the paper highlights how redesigned funding models can function as strategic instruments for building resilient research ecosystems. The case studies illustrate how targeted funding interventions can improve postgraduate progression, enhance demographic transformation of the research workforce, and support institutional research priorities.

The presentation reflects on lessons learned from these reforms and considers how African universities can reimagine postgraduate funding models to advance inclusive research capacity development in an era of constrained resources and evolving national science systems.

— From compliance to excellence: KUHeS DRI's challenging journey to GFGP platinum certification

Mr Richard Mmadi¹, Mr Palinji Mungoni¹, Mrs Esther Gondwe¹

¹Kamuzu University of Health Sciences, Blantyre, Malawi

Biography:

Richard Mmadi holds an MBA in project management, a postgraduate diploma in strategic planning. Richard is a senior research training officer with over 8 years' experience, research methodology instructor, a project monitoring evaluation accountability and learning expert with practical experience in strategic planning and program development.

Introduction:

The Directorate of Research and Innovation (DRI) at Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS) embarked on a transformative journey toward attaining the Global Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) certification at Platinum level. The GFGP standard represents the highest benchmark for financial grant management, transparency, and institutional governance.

Methodology:

A structured institutional strengthening approach was adopted between 2023 and 2026. This included comprehensive self-assessment and gap analysis against GFGP Platinum standards, development and revision of policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), intensive capacity building for staff, risk management reforms, and internal mock audits. Cross project and departmental collaboration were prioritized in key operational areas including finance, procurement, human resources, governance and research administration functions. Continuous monitoring and documentation were implemented to ensure alignment with compliance requirements.

Results:

The journey proved demanding, requiring significant cultural, structural, and operational change. Key challenges included limited initial awareness of GFGP standards, resistance to procedural shifts, resource constraints, and the extensive documentation required to demonstrate compliance. However, capacity building workshops supported by the build it forward SARIMA project, sustained leadership commitment, staff engagement, and partnerships with internal projects led to strengthened internal controls, improved financial accountability systems, enhanced audit preparedness, and greater institutional confidence in managing international grants. KUHeS DRI successfully attained GFGP Platinum certification, positioning the institution among leading compliant research institutions globally.

Conclusion:

Attaining GFGP Platinum certification was not merely a compliance exercise but a transformative institutional reform process. The journey underscored the importance of leadership support, continuous capacity development, documentation discipline, and collaborative teamwork. The experience demonstrates that while achieving the highest level of grant practice standards is challenging, it is attainable through persistence, strategic planning, and collective ownership. KUHeS DRI's experience offers valuable insights for institutions in low resource settings aspiring to strengthen research governance and financial stewardship systems.

— Managing institutional risk in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes: A national independent assessment system for South Africa

Dr Bert Mohr¹

¹Scientific Veterinary Consulting, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Bert Mohr is a veterinary specialist in internal medicine and Founder and CEO of Scientific Veterinary Consulting, supporting institutions to strengthen research ethics governance and compliance systems. He holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford and has more than 25 years of experience in veterinary, biological, and laboratory research. Dr Mohr previously served as Director of the largest academic Centre for Animal Research in Africa. He has contributed to ethics frameworks including the South African National Standard for Animal Research and Teaching (SANS 10386:2021), African guidelines for Animal Ethics Committees, and the NHREC Ethics in Health Research Guidelines.

The care and use of animals for scientific purposes currently underpins biomedical research, testing, conservation, and higher education. Yet weaknesses in institutional governance and compliance systems increasingly expose institutions to regulatory, reputational, financial, and operational risk, threatening research continuity and the resilience of the national research and innovation ecosystem.

Over the past decade, more than 30% of Research Animal Facilities in South Africa have closed because of non-compliance, disrupting scientific programmes, teaching, and institutional capacity. Fewer than 40% of Animal Ethics Committees are registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC), the statutory quality-assurance body for health research ethics committees. At the same time, the national animal welfare regulator (NSPCA) issues formal warnings or notices to comply for welfare concerns in research and teaching institutions on average weekly, with possible prosecution under the Animals Protection Act.

In late 2025, the NHREC announced that it would in future register only Research Ethics Committees (RECs) overseeing health research, leaving most Animal Ethics Committees without a national quality-assurance mechanism to verify compliance with minimum national standards (SANS 10386:2021). This has created a significant governance gap, leaving institutions without an independent mechanism to evaluate and demonstrate compliance with South Africa's minimum national standard.

We introduce a national independent assessment system for institutional care and use of animals for scientific purposes. The Ethical Animal Care & Use Blueprint™ framework evaluates twelve interconnected institutional capabilities: policy, governance, compliance, personnel, facilities, animal welfare, ethical oversight, quality-assurance, competence, partnerships, resilience and culture.

Three levels of evaluation are offered: BASELINE, a high-level review for rapid benchmarking and identifying immediate institutional risks; ESSENTIAL, a mid-level evaluation of institutional systems and processes, with tailored recommendations to strengthen governance, compliance, and operational resilience; and COMPREHENSIVE, an in-depth, system-wide evaluation including on-site assessments of facilities, broad stakeholder engagement and detailed reporting, designed for institutions aspiring to move beyond compliance towards sustained organisational excellence in animal care and use.

The framework strengthens governance, protects research continuity and strategic partnerships, and provides a scalable independent assessment methodology that can be adapted to national regulatory and standards frameworks in other low- and middle-income countries.

—Agentic AI for technology transfer: SOP framework for disclosure and commercialisation

Mr Lucky Mokalusi¹

¹Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Omphemetsi Lucky Mokalusi is a Technology Analyst at the Central University of Technology. His work focuses on innovation management and intellectual property governance, particularly in early-stage technology assessment and disclosure triage. His role includes applying Section 25 exclusions, assessing patentability thresholds, and guiding research disclosures towards appropriate protection pathways, including patents, copyright, know-how, or publication.

Mokalusi supports institutional innovation processes and research governance, promoting the responsible commercialisation of publicly funded research. He is actively involved with SARIMA and is currently working towards professional accreditation as a Registered Technology Transfer Professional (RTTP)

Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) are increasingly required to evaluate growing numbers of invention disclosures while ensuring consistent intellectual property (IP) assessment, regulatory compliance and evidence-based commercialisation decisions. Many institutions, particularly emerging innovation ecosystems, operate with limited capacity, which can limit the ability of TTO professionals to conduct patentability, freedom-to-operate and market analyses for every disclosure.

This poster presents a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) framework for incorporating agent-based artificial intelligence (AI) into technology transfer workflows. In this context, agent-based AI refers to coordinated systems composed of specialised analytical components designed to perform specific tasks within defined governance boundaries. The framework highlights several areas where AI can support the evaluation process of invention disclosures, conducting prior-art searches and analysing patent landscapes, performing initial screening against Section 25 patentability requirements, identifying potential commercial opportunities through market intelligence and verifying alignment with institutional IP policies, funding requirements and regulatory obligations. These capabilities are integrated into a staged workflow that includes disclosure intake, AI-supported evaluation, human review checkpoints and clearly defined decision pathways. The approach assists TTOs in directing research disclosures towards appropriate outcomes such as patent protection, know-how protection, licensing opportunities, collaborative development agreements, spin-out formation or publication. Human oversight remains central to the model, ensuring that AI-generated insights support rather than replace professional judgment. The framework also incorporates principles of auditability, transparency and institutional accountability. The poster contributes a practical model for responsible AI adoption in technology transfer and proposes a scalable approach to strengthening disclosure evaluation processes within increasingly complex research and innovation environments

— Graduate research management system: A key electronic tool in research management and innovation.

Mrs Keneoue Patrica Mokoena¹

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Mrs Keneoue Mokoena is a young professional with a strong interest in project management, particularly in the development, management and maintenance of university tracking systems. She is currently pursuing a career in project management and information technology. Her professional interest include postgraduate tracking systems and examining the role that postgraduate students play in advancing research and innovation within the higher education sector.

The integration of digital technology in higher education plays a strategic role in shaping the broader research and innovation management landscape within higher education. The research and graduate offices often operate in silos and this can lead to missed integration opportunities. At the University of the Free State, the Graduate Research Management (GRM) system (an electronic system), focuses on tracking and monitoring doctoral candidates' research journey and can serve as preparatory mechanism for emerging researchers and act as a catalyst for research and innovation.

This paper will explore the role of GRM in systematically tracking doctoral candidates, monitoring their research progress and the successful completion of their respective projects. By strengthening doctoral tracking, governance, productivity and their involvement in the overall institutional research, GRM not only enhances candidate support and monitoring but also contributes to broader institutional research performance and innovation. Moreover, this study will propose strategies and frameworks that will foster collaboration between the research and graduate offices. Ultimately, improved doctoral candidate management will aid in cultivating emerging researchers, thus contribute to research outputs and improve the institution's standing and its global footprint.

— Extending UTAUT for research and innovation management: A conceptual model of research management system adoption

Mr Keoagile Mosala¹

¹University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Mr Keoagile G. Mosala is a Research Information Officer with a strong focus on digital transformation in research and innovation management. He supports the implementation, configuration, and continuous improvement of research ethics and grants-related systems, ensuring that processes are efficient, user-friendly, and aligned to institutional policies and regulatory requirements. His responsibilities include stakeholder engagement, requirements gathering, process mapping, quality assurance, user support, training material development, and performance reporting. He is committed to strengthening research governance through practical, sustainable systems that improve transparency, compliance, and service delivery across the research lifecycle.

Research and innovation management (RIM) is increasingly dependent on digital systems to support ethics review, grant administration, research outputs, compliance reporting, and stakeholder engagement. Yet many institutions struggle with recurring system disruptions, inefficiencies, and escalating costs rooted in fragmented platforms, vendor dependency, and inadequate internal capability revealing that digital transformation in RIM is fundamentally an institutional capacity challenge, not merely a technology selection decision.

This paper aims to develop a conceptual model that extends the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) with constructs specific to the RIM context, in order to explain and predict Research Management System (RMS) adoption in higher education and research institutions.

Using a conceptual theory-building approach grounded in IS acceptance literature and RIM practice, the paper extends UTAUT by identifying and defining five RIM-specific constructs: governance fit, perceived compliance burden, trust in system outputs, data quality confidence, and role-based usefulness. Each construct is defined, contextualised within RIM workflows, and linked to established UTAUT antecedents through a set of theoretically derived propositions.

The paper produces three deliverables: an extended conceptual model (Extended UTAUT-RIM), a construct definition table mapping each construct to its RIM manifestation and expected direction, and a set of testable propositions (P1–P10) specifying relationships between constructs and behavioural intention to adopt RMS. The model captures how RIM-specific pressures, including governance maturity, compliance load, and data integrity concerns, moderate acceptance pathways across different institutional roles.

This work contributes a theoretically grounded, context-sensitive framework for future empirical validation, and offers research managers and institutional leaders practical guidance for diagnosing adoption barriers and designing capacity-building interventions that support stable, compliant, and future-ready RIM environments.

— Supporting responsible research practices: Navigating assessment, publishing, and digital transformation: Perspectives from UFS

Ms Thabi Mosoetsa¹, Mr Thato Molefi¹

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Miss Thabi Mosoetsa is a professional staff member at the University of the Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein, South Africa. She serves as the NRF Grants Coordinator at Research Development, where she supports the administration and coordination of research funding.

In her role, Miss Mosoetsa assists academic staff and researchers with matters related to research grants, funding opportunities, and application processes. She ensures that grant applications comply with institutional and funding-body requirements.

Miss Mosoetsa contributes to strengthening research capacity at UFS. Her work forms part of the broader effort by the university to promote high-quality research and innovation across its faculties.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Mr Thato Molefi is a Finance Officer in the Research Development division at the University of the Free State. In this role, he supports the financial management of research projects and funding within the institution.

His responsibilities include monitoring research budgets, ensuring compliance with financial policies, and assisting researchers with financial reporting for funded projects.

The University of the Free State (UFS) supports responsible research practices (RRPs) for projects funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and other funding bodies through a combination of institutional policies, ethics oversight, training, and grant-management systems. These mechanisms ensure that NRF-funded research is conducted with integrity, accountability, and compliance with national funding requirements. From a finance officer's perspective, supporting responsible practices in assessment, publishing, and digital transformation involves ensuring that financial resources are managed efficiently, transparently, and in ways that strengthen institutional integrity and sustainability.

The adoption of a comprehensive institutional framework and a grant management support system (e.g. RIMS) guides researchers in adhering to ethical and professional standards throughout the research lifecycle. Our policies emphasize honesty, accountability, transparency and respect for research participants and collaborators. Researchers receiving NRF funding are required to comply with the institutional guidelines as well as the conditions set by the NRF. Ethical oversight is another critical component of responsible research at the UFS. Our research committees ensure that projects meet established ethical standards and legal requirements. In terms of assessment, a finance officer plays a key role in ensuring that funding allocations for research and academic programs, are based on fair, transparent, and accountable evaluation processes. Proper financial oversight helps us ascertain that resources are distributed according to set criteria that contributes to high quality outcomes rather than simply rewarding quantity and short-term results.

In addition, UFS promotes responsible research through training workshops, mentorship programmes, and support for data management and open-access publication. These initiatives help researchers and postgraduate students develop skills in ethical research conduct, responsible authorship, and transparent data practices.

Together, these institutional mechanisms enable UFS to align with NRF expectations and foster a culture of responsible, ethical, and accountable research.

— Strategic partnerships for impact: The Madiba Nexus Model for Equitable North–South research collaboration

Dr Palesa Mothapo¹

¹Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Biography:

Palesa is an accomplished Scientist and Research Manager currently serving as Director: Research Support and Management at Nelson Mandela University, overseeing strategic research priorities, policies, research strategy, grants management, research business advancement, and research intelligence. She has proven expertise in securing research funding, leading high-impact interdisciplinary research initiatives, and establishing global university-industry collaborations. She holds a PhD in Zoology coupled with various certificates in research management practices. Palesa is passionate about fostering a culture of research excellence, innovation, and entrepreneurship while driving impactful and policy-aligned research.

In an increasingly uncertain global research funding environment, universities in the Global South must strategically rethink how international partnerships are designed, governed, and sustained to deliver meaningful impact. Traditional North–South collaborations have often reproduced structural inequalities in agenda setting, funding flows, and leadership. The Madiba Nexus Project, developed at Nelson Mandela University, offers an emerging institutional model for building equitable research partnerships that strengthen Global South leadership while meeting evolving funder expectations. The Madiba Nexus Project was established as a strategic collaboration platform aimed at fostering interdisciplinary research partnerships, strengthening institutional networks, and positioning African universities as co-creators of globally relevant knowledge. Rather than relying solely on transactional project-based collaborations, the initiative prioritises relationship-driven engagement, co-designed research agendas, and long-term institutional partnerships that align global scientific priorities with development challenges in Africa. Central to the model is the enabling role of research and innovation management in coordinating partnerships, negotiating collaboration frameworks, and strengthening institutional readiness for international engagement. Through structured convenings, partnership development activities, and collaborative research initiatives, the Madiba Nexus Project has contributed to expanding international research networks, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, and strengthening institutional capacity for equitable global engagement. This presentation reflects on the governance mechanisms, partnership-building strategies, and coordination approaches that have enabled the initiative to cultivate resilient collaborations while ensuring meaningful participation and leadership from Global South institutions. It further demonstrates how research management offices can act as strategic brokers of collaboration, aligning institutional priorities with global funding opportunities while safeguarding equitable partnership principles. The Madiba Nexus model offers practical lessons for research and innovation managers seeking to build sustainable international collaborations that simultaneously advance scientific excellence, strengthen research ecosystems, and deliver meaningful societal impact in the Global South.

— Advancing ethical indigenous research: Community leadership, respect, and trust

Mrs Bagele Motlathedi¹

¹University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Biography:

I currently work as a Research Ethics Professional in the Office of Research & Development at the University of Botswana. My interest lies in highlights the need to uphold ethical principles such as respect, trust, and community leadership in Indigenous research. It ensures that research involving Indigenous peoples is conducted with cultural sensitivity, meaningful community engagement, and shared decision-making.

It aims to enhance ethics officers' skills in overseeing research involving Indigenous communities by increasing their cultural competence, ensuring respect for Indigenous rights, and promoting ethical engagement. The goal is to ensure research is conducted ethically and collaboratively with Indigenous peoples.

Ethical research involving indigenous communities requires approaches that prioritise respect, partnership, and community leadership. Historical experiences of extractive or harmful research have contributed to mistrust, highlighting the need for research practices that recognise indigenous rights, knowledge systems, and authority over community information. This poster outlines key ethical principles and responsibilities for conducting respectful research with indigenous communities.

Central to ethical engagement is meaningful community involvement throughout the research process, from the early stages of project design to data collection, interpretation, and dissemination. Researchers must obtain both community approval and individual informed consent, while adhering to relevant cultural protocols and governance structures. Indigenous communities should retain a strong voice in decisions regarding the collection, management, access, and future use of data generated from their communities.

The poster also highlights practical challenges that may arise, including the legacy of past harmful research, cultural differences in knowledge systems, and communication barriers arising from language or differing ways of expressing knowledge. Addressing these challenges requires culturally sensitive engagement, open dialogue, and sustained relationship-building.

To support ethical and respectful practice, several good practices are recommended. These include active listening and valuing indigenous knowledge and perspectives, transparent communication about research objectives and expected outcomes, the use of respectful and culturally appropriate language, adequate time for trust-building, and clear agreements regarding benefit sharing and data governance.

Overall, the poster advocates for research approaches that respect indigenous rights, protect cultural knowledge, and promote outcomes that are meaningful and beneficial to the communities involved.

— The framework of Shock-Response-Adaptation + Antifragility in African research systems

Mr Lucky Msimango¹

¹North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

Biography:

Lucky Msimango is a Senior Research Support Officer at North-West University. He holds a BA (Public Governance), LLB, and LLM. He led the North-West University's acquisition of Good Financial Grant Practice accreditation (Platinum status), showcasing proficiency in institutional strengthening, compliance systems, and governance. He created important SOPs and guidelines that aid in the execution of frameworks for grant management and compliance. His interests are adaptive governance, capacity building, and resilient research ecosystems, combining legal training with a systems-thinking approach. He seeks to provide African universities with useful strategies to improve governance, withstand disruption, and develop sustainable research and innovation capacity.

Across the African continent, systems of research and innovation are functioning in circumstances that are increasingly characterized by unpredictability, disruption, and governance demands that are always changing. Shocks include funding changes, regulatory changes, and worldwide shocks like the Covid-19 pandemic, reveal system vulnerabilities in institutional research management. This presentation seeks to make a contribution to the following conference theme: Building Resilient and Adaptive Research & Innovation Ecosystems in Times of Disruption. It offers a structured conceptual framework which will help us understand how the system of research management can anticipate, absorb and adapt to shocks within complex institutional environments.

This abstract proposes a framework of Shock–Response–Adaptation integrated with Antifragility principles. It is grounded in Systems-thinking and Organizational Resilience theory. Through these theories, the research ecosystem is viewed as a system which is complex and interconnected, and where disruptions do not occur in isolation. The incorporation of antifragility principles in the framework is a move beyond the traditional resilience approaches which focus on the maintenance of stability. The framework emphasises the institutional systems' capacity to learn from shocks, adapt the processes of their organisations, and come out of the disruption more resilient and capable.

Resilience here is conceptualized as three interlinked phases. These include Shock, Response, and Adaptation. The shock phase involves the process of anticipation and mapping. The Response phase focuses on rapid operational activation. The Adaptation phase emphasizes learning and Institutional strengthening.

Too often resilience is operationalized in abstract principles and not concrete actions. This presentation will be of benefit to the participants as they will gain a practical framework to apply to their institutions to assess their institutions' preparedness. They will be able to identify system vulnerabilities and design adaptive strategies which will enhance the long-term sustainability and resilience of the ecosystems of research and innovation.

— Navigating an increasingly complex funding environment: Can artificial intelligence support research management in African universities?

Ms Melissa Nakiyaga¹

¹Makerere University School of Public Health, Kampala, Uganda

Biography:

Melissa Nakiyaga is a Grants Officer at Makerere University School of Public Health where she supports researchers in grant proposal development, funding opportunity identification, and compliance with donor and institutional requirements. Her work focuses on strengthening research management systems, facilitating collaborative research partnerships and supporting the effective administration of international research grants. She is interested in emerging research management trends, particularly the use of digital tools and AI to improve efficiency and support researchers in navigating complex funding environments. She is an ACCA-qualified professional and a UASP fellow with exposure to international research management practices.

In recent years, research funding has become more demanding as donors introduce stricter regulations, detailed reporting requirements, and stronger accountability expectations. While intended to improve transparency and responsible use of funds, these changes place significant pressure on research management offices, particularly in African universities where administrative capacity is often limited.

For many research administrators, the role involves navigating complex donor guidelines, identifying funding opportunities, supporting proposal development, and ensuring compliance with increasing requirements. While essential, these tasks are often time-consuming, and as funding opportunities and regulations grow, research offices are expected to do more with the same or fewer resources.

This presentation explores whether emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), can support research administrators by assisting with routine and information-intensive tasks such as scanning funding calls, summarising donor guidelines, highlighting compliance requirements, and organising grant documentation, allowing administrators to spend more time supporting researchers strategically.

At the same time, the adoption of AI in research management raises important questions. Institutions must consider issues related to digital infrastructure, data security, ethical use of technology, and staff readiness to engage with new tools. In many African universities, the challenge is not only about adopting new technologies but also about ensuring that these technologies are used in ways that genuinely strengthen institutional systems rather than creating new complexities.

Drawing on practical experiences in research administration in African universities, this presentation discusses how research management offices can adapt to an increasingly complex funding landscape and how AI may support compliance, improve efficiency, and help institutions remain competitive in securing international research funding. Ultimately, the discussion does not present AI as a solution to every challenge but explores how research administrators can integrate new tools while maintaining the human judgment, relationships, and institutional knowledge essential to effective research management.

— Transforming South Africa's health research ecosystem: Lessons from the SAMRC's research capacity development initiative (2015-2025)

Dr Frederic Nduhirabandi¹, Dr Abeda Dawood¹, Dr Michelle Mulder^{1,2}

¹Research Capacity development Division, South African Medical Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa, ²Grants, Innovation and Product Development Division, South African Medical Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Frederic Nduhirabandi is the Programme Manager for Research Capacity Development (RCD) Career Awards at the South African Medical Research Council, where he oversees funding initiatives aimed at strengthening South Africa's health research capacity. Over the past six years, he has led programmes supporting early- and mid-career scientists, including grant initiatives focused on historically disadvantaged institutions. Dr Nduhirabandi holds a PhD in Health Sciences and an MPhil in Science and Technology Studies. He has also contributed to international research capacity development guidelines as a member of the ESSENCE on Health Research-Research Management working group.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Dr Abeda Dawood is the Division Manager: Research Capacity Development at the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC). The SAMRC's Division of Research Capacity Development (RCD) is a well-established research funding division that runs streamlined funding programmes to support the growth of health research capacity, by offering multiple strategic capacity development grants in the national research priorities and directly contributing to National Targets for research capacity development as well as transformation. The two portfolios include Research Grants and Scholarships; funding early to mid-career researchers and postgraduate students, mainly PhDs.

Transforming South Africa's research landscape requires sustained investment in strengthening the research capabilities of Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs). Over the past decade, the need for capacity development in HDIs has been recognised as central to advancing equity, excellence, and transformation within the national research ecosystem. National strategies emphasise a holistic and tailored approach that combines ring-fenced grants, strategic partnerships with established institutions, and intensive capacity-building interventions, rather than relying on financial support alone. However, institutional contexts vary, and effective research capacity strengthening in practice must be grounded in models that develop individual researchers, enhance institutional systems, and define best practices suitable for the South African HDI health research environment.

The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) is committed to diversifying its support for health research in South Africa and expanding and strengthening the country's overall health research capacity. Since 2015, the SAMRC has funded HDIs through its Research Capacity Development Initiative for Selected Universities (RCDI programme). This initiative came after the SAMRC recognised that some universities in South Africa were not sufficiently accessing funding from the council. We present practical insights from the SAMRC's RCDI programme implemented since 2015 across eight universities. Evidence from this initiative shows that researchers embedded in strong teams and supported through collaborations with research-intensive institutions demonstrate greater success in utilising funding and advancing research outputs. The initiative also highlights the need for funding mechanisms that offer flexibility, integrate postgraduate scholarships/bursaries into principal investigator-led projects, prioritise impact and feasibility, and provide structured mentorship and support for collaboration. Strengthening university research management systems and ensuring sustained institutional engagement emerge as critical for long-term gains in under-resourced environments.

These lessons contribute to an improved, forward-looking funding practice for transforming South Africa's health research landscape through equitable capacity development, strategic collaboration, and a strengthened institutional support system

— From outputs to impact: Strengthening research and innovation management for societal value

Ms Segolame Obatleng Nkape¹, Dr Dimpho Ralefala¹

¹University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Biography:

Segolame Nkape is a Biomedical Research Professional at the University of Botswana under the Office of Research and Development. She holds a B.Sc. in Biology with a Chemistry minor and focuses on supporting ethical research practices, coordinating undergraduate research, and ensuring compliance with institutional and national governance standards. Segolame regularly delivers guest lectures on research ethics and integrity, fostering awareness and responsible research practices among students and researchers. She has completed multiple certifications in research ethics, clinical research, and research integrity, reinforcing her commitment to ethical and accountable research management.

The growing demand for research to demonstrate tangible societal value has elevated the strategic role of Research and Innovation Management (RIM) in enabling impact beyond traditional academic outputs. While publications and patents remain important indicators of scholarly productivity, there is increasing recognition that social, economic, environmental, and policy contributions should be intentionally embedded within the research lifecycle. Despite this growing emphasis on research impact, there remains limited understanding of how research management structures can systematically support researchers to integrate impact planning from the early stages of research design.

This study therefore seeks to examine how research management systems and practices can facilitate the early integration of impact planning through structured pathways, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with national and institutional development priorities. Therefore, this study will employ a qualitative and policy-analytical approach, involving the analysis of institutional policies, research management frameworks, and relevant guidance documents related to research impact planning. Document analysis will be used to examine how impact considerations are articulated within research management processes such as proposal development, research governance, partnership models, and capacity-building initiatives. The data will be analysed using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo and guided by the Framework Method for qualitative data analysis, enabling a systematic examination and comparison of how impact planning is embedded within research management structures.

The analysis will focus on conceptualisations of impact, stakeholder engagement mechanisms, pathways to impact, institutional support systems, and approaches for monitoring and evaluation. This will enable a comprehensive assessment of how research management structures can move impact assessment beyond retrospective reporting toward proactive design and continuous evaluation throughout the research lifecycle. By identifying practical and scalable approaches for integrating impact planning into research management systems, this will strengthen institutional accountability, enhance the societal relevance of research, and advance professional practice in Research and Innovation Management.

— Building research resilience: Grant writing mentorship as a strategic tool for empowering early career researchers

Mr Jonathan Nkata¹

¹Medical Research Council - Uganda/ London School Of Hygiene, Kampala, Uganda

Biography:

I am a Project Officer at the Research Support Office of the MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, with over five years of experience supporting various projects in Non-government Organizations. Holding a BSc in Accounting and Finance and currently pursuing a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) qualification, I bring strong financial and project management expertise to research operations. My work focuses on empowering Early Career Researchers through grant writing mentorship and advancing sustainable research capacity in low- and middle-income countries.

Securing competitive research funding has become increasingly difficult for early career researchers (ERCs), particularly in large research institutions where scientists are often deeply engaged in ongoing projects but have limited opportunities to develop independent grant-writing skills. In many cases, researchers, both junior and mid-career, tend to work on already funded projects rather than initiate new proposals. While this structure sustains ongoing research programs, it can restrict opportunities for emerging scholars to gain the experience required to lead grant applications and develop independent research projects.

This paper examines how a structured mentorship initiative at the MRC/UVRI and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) Uganda Research Unit can strengthen the grant writing capacity of both early career and mid-career researchers. The proposed model facilitates mentorship, collaborative proposal development, and access to institutional resources. Through targeted workshops, writing clinics, and collaborative proposal teams, the program encourages ERCs to work closely with experienced researchers in developing high-quality proposals.

A central component of the initiative involves supporting researchers to develop draft proposals and research ideas even in the absence of immediate funding calls. By preparing proposals in advance and encouraging interdisciplinary teamwork, researchers are better positioned to respond quickly to funding opportunities when they arise. At the same time, the program aims to encourage senior researchers to play a more active role in mentorship and in initiating grant applications.

This paper highlights how institutional support structures can help cultivate a more proactive grant-writing culture, expand opportunities for early career researchers, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of research programs. The proposed mentorship model offers a practical approach that other research institutions can adapt to strengthen research capacity and improve grant competitiveness.

— Making innovation visible: Practical lessons from a university technology transfer office

Ms Ntombiyenkosi Nkosi¹

¹North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Biography:

Ntombiyenkosi Nkosi is a Technology Transfer Specialist at North-West University, South Africa. She works with researchers to identify, protect, and commercialise intellectual property arising from academic research, and supports technology transfer projects from disclosure through to industry engagement.

She previously worked as a Commercialisation Officer at the Central University of Technology and as a Patent Examiner at the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission. Ntombiyenkosi holds an Honours degree in Chemistry from the University of Zululand and has a strong interest in innovation management, intellectual property, and strengthening university innovation ecosystems.

Universities are traditionally evaluated using academic indicators such as publications and citations. However, from a technology transfer perspective, institutional impact is more meaningfully reflected in outcomes such as intellectual property generation, industry partnerships, licensing agreements, start-up creation, and technologies reaching the market.

This presentation offers a practice-based reflection from the Technology Transfer and Innovation Support Office (TTIS) at North-West University (NWU) on how technology transfer offices can strengthen the visibility and positioning of institutional innovation portfolios. Drawing on practical experience within a university context, the presentation highlights approaches used to communicate innovation more effectively to stakeholders within national and global innovation ecosystems.

The presentation discusses several institutional practices implemented to improve innovation visibility. These include mapping the institutional innovation pipeline from invention disclosure to commercialization, monitoring technology readiness level (TRL) progression, and presenting innovation outcomes through structured reporting and targeted storytelling. Examples of licensing activities and industry collaborations are used to illustrate how innovation narratives can move beyond simple patent counts to demonstrate real-world impact.

The role of digital communication platforms is also considered as a mechanism for showcasing innovation pipelines and engaging diverse stakeholders including researchers, investors, industry partners, government, and development agencies. In addition, the presentation reflects on the balance between Open Science and intellectual property protection, highlighting the importance of carefully managing disclosure while maintaining transparency and collaboration.

By sharing practical lessons and institutional practices from NWU TTIS, the presentation demonstrates how technology transfer offices can play a strategic role in strengthening innovation visibility, fostering partnerships, and communicating the broader societal value of university research.

— Research security as a pillar of responsible research management

Mr Ayakha Nyangeni¹, Dr Cornelia Malherbe¹

¹Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Biography:

Ayakha Nyangeni serves as Legal Advisor: Research Contracts & Compliance in the Research Contracts unit, which forms part of the Division for Research Development at Stellenbosch University. In this capacity, he advises academic staff, postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students on the negotiation and drafting of research-related agreements. Beyond contract negotiation, Ayakha provides guidance on regulatory compliance in the research environment.

The global research landscape is increasingly shaped by international collaboration, which, while fostering innovation and knowledge exchange, also introduces significant security challenges. In response to rising geopolitical tensions and concerns over non-reciprocal knowledge transfers, many countries have adopted comprehensive Research Security frameworks aiming to protect publicly funded research from foreign interference, IP theft, dual-use item misuse, and cyber threats, while maintaining academic openness and integrity. South Africa, as a non-aligned country, upholds its constitutional sovereignty and independence. Existing statutes do touch on data protection and the control of dual-use items, but they do not form a coherent shield for research management. This gap directly impacts the ability of institutions to embed responsible research practices across three critical pillars of modern research management. Research outputs developed in South Africa may be taken abroad without fair return. International partnerships, left unchecked, may open doors to covert access to sensitive data. The rapid move toward digital platforms has multiplied the threat of cyberattacks. Research that is meant for peaceful ends could, without proper safeguards, be turned to other purposes. Failure to meet emerging global standards may quietly close doors to the very collaborations we need if we are to remain credible global research partners on the world stage. These risks sit squarely within the daily work of responsible research management. In the continued absence of national policy, the question faced by universities is therefore practical and urgent: how can a public South African university protect its research while honouring the constitutional values of openness and sovereignty, and while continuing to play its part as a trusted participant in global research collaborations? Drawing on international best practices, a proposal towards navigating these complexities will be offered within the context of internationalisation and also promoting a resilient and ethically grounded research culture.

— Strengthening responsible research practices through ethics governance and institutional culture: A South African case study

Dr Lisa Repsold¹, Dr Tonderai Muchenje¹

¹Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

Biography:

Dr Lisa Repsold is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Science, Tshwane University of Technology, where she serves as Section Head and Chairperson of the TUT Human Research Ethics Committee. She holds a PhD in Human Physiology, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Pedagogical Studies. As Chairperson of the TUT HREC, Dr Repsold plays a pivotal role in strengthening ethical governance across the University. She oversees the review of research involving human participants, supports researchers and postgraduate students in navigating ethical requirements, and contributes to policy development, promoting a culture of responsible, ethically sound research.

Responsible research practices depend not only on formal governance structures but also on institutional cultures that enable ethical decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Research and innovation managers play a key role in strengthening these systems by ensuring that policies, ethics review processes, and organisational practices support research integrity across the research lifecycle.

This presentation reports on an Ethics Opportunity and Risk Assessment (ERA) conducted at a large South African university to evaluate perceptions of institutional ethics governance, research integrity systems, and ethical culture among Research Ethics Committee members. The mixed-method assessment combined quantitative Likert-scale measures of ethical conduct, ethical culture, and ethics management with qualitative responses exploring ethical risks, leadership behaviours, and organisational challenges.

Findings indicated moderate to low confidence in institutional ethics systems, particularly in areas related to ethics management visibility, reporting mechanisms, and psychological safety for raising ethical concerns. While formal structures such as research ethics committees and policy frameworks were perceived to exist, participants highlighted gaps between formal governance systems and lived ethical culture. Concerns included inconsistent policy application, limited trust in whistleblowing mechanisms, and a perceived lack of visible ethical leadership.

Drawing on these findings, the project developed an institutional ethics strategy aimed at strengthening responsible research practices through integrated governance reforms. Key interventions include the establishment of a centralised ethics and integrity office, leadership training in ethical decision-making, improved reporting and whistleblowing systems, enhanced ethics communication, and regular institutional ethics climate monitoring.

The case study illustrates how research managers can move beyond compliance-driven approaches to build institutional cultures that actively support research integrity. Lessons from this experience offer practical insights for African research institutions seeking to strengthen governance systems, improve trust in ethics processes, and embed responsible research practices within evolving research and innovation management ecosystems.

— Institutional best practices for realigning research ethics support to promote research impact

Ms Boemo Segoje¹, Mr Thabo Mokgokong¹

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Boemo Segoje is a research ethics officer in the Research Development department at the University of the Free State. She graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with an honours degree in Sociology. In her current role, she is responsible for ethical clearance queries and the processing of creative outputs. Core responsibilities include providing ethics training and emphasising ethical principles to the University of the Free State community. Boemo has completed the research ethics training for members. This training is accredited at Level 1 for 11 Ethics CEUs. Further, Boemo successfully completed the assessed training in Animal Research Ethics.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Thabo Mokgokong currently serves as an Assistant Officer in Research Development department at the University of the Free State. He holds a B.Tech degree in Tourism Management from the Central University of Technology. Mr. Mokgokong functions as the RIMS Ethics Helpdesk, his daily duties include assisting internal and external researchers with access to the UFS Research Information Management System, navigating the RIMS Online platform, correcting and Updating Profiles, Conducting Research Ethics Training and Presentations, handling RIMS Queries, and Providing Administrative Support. Mr Mokgokong also assists with transcribing and taking minutes of the 3 UFS Ethics Committees.

Research ethics processes are often perceived as purely administrative processes primarily designed for regulatory compliance. However, within the Research Ethics Office at the University of the Free State (UFS), we have repositioned ethics support as a strategic mechanism to promote research impact. As Research managers, we interact with thousands of researchers every year, providing client-facing support. We do this by guiding researchers with their ethical clearance applications on the University's Research Information Management System (RIMS). Beyond facilitating ethics applications on the system, as research managers, we also have the responsibility to deliver structured training to the UFS community on the importance of Research Ethics, in accordance with the national research ethics guidelines and regulations, such as the 2024 National Department of Health (NDoH) guidelines. These sessions are delivered through group workshops and one-on-one advisory consultations, ensuring inclusion and support across disciplines.

We provide intensive guidance to researchers on aligning their projects with the key ethical norms and principles outlined in section 2.3 of the 2024 NDoH guidelines. For example, in our trainings and consultations, we highlight subsection 2.3.3 of the 2024 NDoH guidelines, which promotes stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement fosters transparency, relativity, and increases the acceptability of the research within various communities. The act of stakeholder engagement ensures that researchers are fostering collaborative partnerships with diverse communities to strategically expand and reimagine the scope of research impact. This engagement enables co-creation and further ensures that the research moves beyond research outputs, serving as a catalyst for change in society.

Through testimonies, we see that proactive research ethics support from Research Development departments in higher education institutions strengthens quality, legitimacy, and societal relevance. Through our work, we attest that institutional ethics best practices directly advance accountable and impact-oriented research. Our presentation encourages colleagues to use ethics training as a tool.

— Embedding strategic pre award capacity building through integrated international grants support: Strengthening institutional readiness

Ms Likho Sikutshwa¹, Ms Jacqueline Sylvester¹

¹University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Biography:

Likho Sikutshwa is an International Grants Coordinator in UCT's International Grants Hub, supporting high-impact, multidisciplinary research through specialized pre-award services for international funding. With experience across all faculties, they guide academics through the full grant lifecycle; from identifying funding opportunities and interpreting complex funder requirements to coordinating multi-partner proposals, compliance, and submission. Likho has supported applications to major national and international funders, including UKRI, OMT, IDRC and the British Academy.

Co-Presenting Author Biography:

Jacqueline Sylvester (Jacky) is an International Grants Coordinator with over 20 years of experience in Research Management and Administration. Based in the International Grants Hub within UCT's central Research Office, she has extensive experience with both national and international funders, including the NRF, EU, and Wellcome Trust. She and her colleagues on the International Grants Hub team work with academic applicants to help them identify funding opportunities; assess their suitability and eligibility; and prepare their funding applications so they can submit competitive international proposals.

Competitive international research funding increasingly requires institutions to provide advanced, centrally coordinated pre-award support capable of navigating complex funder requirements, multidisciplinary collaboration, and tightening compliance requirements. This presentation explores how the University of Cape Town's International Grants Hub (IGH) strengthens institutional readiness by providing integrated, ongoing pre-award capacity building as a core operational function instead of a separate training programme.

IGH offers proposal development and administrative support across the whole pre-award lifecycle as UCT's specialized support structure for international grant submissions. This includes horizon scanning for relevant opportunities, interpreting funder requirements and evolving compliance frameworks, strengthening proposal components, coordinating multinational and multidisciplinary teams, assist with developing budgets, and guiding researchers through internal approval pathways. These services serve as strategic infrastructure in a decentralized institutional setting, improving proposal quality, lowering compliance risk, and ensuring alignment with funder requirements and institutional procedures.

Additionally, by selectively using automated tools to optimize important processes in the pre-award workflow, lowering administrative delays, and freeing up research managers to concentrate on higher-value strategic assistance, IGH's work advances digital transformation. By embedding continuous, researcher responsive capacity building within day-to-day pre-award operations, IGH helps to increase institutional competitiveness.

This contribution highlights how an integrated pre-award support unit can serve as a key enabler of long-term research growth, institutional preparedness, as well as a scalable model for research management teams working in resource constrained and decentralized university environments.

— A process map for Integrated chronic diseases care research: Lessons from the INTECOMM study

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Biography:

I am a Project Management specialist with a Master of Public Health (MPH) and extensive experience in managing multidisciplinary health research projects in low- and middle-income countries spanning over 10 years. My work focuses on coordinating research initiatives, financial and operational management, and stakeholder engagement.

Background: INTE-COMM was a 4-year research project led by LSTM, MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit and National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in Tanzania. The project objective was to design a community – based integrated model of care for the management of patients with HIV, diabetes and hypertension. In low resource settings, community-based research is essential to generate locally contextualized evidence to inform health policy and practice. However, conducting research in such socially complex environments often presents operational and logistical challenges that are often not structurally documented. Research Support Offices play an important role in providing oversight and coordination of the different research processes and stages. This paper will develop a process map based on implementation experiences by the INTECOMM study to identify key steps, decision points, and coordination mechanisms for successful implementation.

Methods: A qualitative reflective approach will be used to document key processes, challenges, and mitigation strategies encountered during project implementation. Data will be derived from a review of project documents, operational records, and team reflection. Key domains to assess will include context, intervention, dissemination, adaptation, implementation, and sustainability. These will be analyzed to identify critical steps and decision points for synthesis into a process map outlining the key stages of implementation.

Results: A process map outlining the key stages for implementation of integrated chronic disease care research will be developed. The process map will identify interconnected phases, cross-cutting processes, critical decision points, coordination mechanisms, and operational considerations necessary for effective project implementation.

Conclusion: Implementation research in resource constrained settings requires adaptability, strong local partnerships and collaborations, and robust operational planning. The INTECOMM study implementation process map will provide practical guidance for future researchers to design context appropriate studies with sustainable research practices.

— Transforming research administration through a sustainable integrated research information management system

Mrs Maricel Van Rooyen, Mr Willem Kilian

¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Maricél van Rooyen is the Project Manager for the Research Information Management System (RIMS) and Ethics Adviser at the University of the Free State. With over sixteen years of experience in research ethics, digital research management, and system development, she holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Ethics (2018) and an MPhil in Environmental Ethics (2020), both completed cum laude at Stellenbosch University. Since 2009, Maricél has played a central role in developing and configuring multiple InfoEd modules and integrations. She also presents regularly at international InfoEd User Group Meetings, contributing expertise in system implementation and workflow optimisation.

Many African universities still rely on manual or fragmented systems to manage research activities, creating inefficiencies, compliance risks, and limited access to reliable data. This poster presents practical lessons learned from developing and implementing a comprehensive digital Research and Innovation Management System (RIMS) designed to streamline all research-related administrative processes.

Drawing on real implementation experience, the poster demonstrates how an integrated enterprise solution can effectively support the full research lifecycle, including Research Ethics and Compliance workflows, Grants Administration, Research Agreements, Research Outputs reporting, and Innovation and Technology Transfer management. It also highlights the value of integrating SPIN, the world's largest sponsor and funding opportunity database, to strengthen researchers' access to global funding sources.

Key capacity-building elements, such as process redesign, staff upskilling, data governance, system interoperability, and change management, are presented as critical success factors. The lessons learned illustrate how strategic digital transformation enables research offices to improve efficiency, enhance compliance, and deliver more proactive support to researchers.

Overall, the poster offers a practical roadmap for institutions seeking to build sustainable digital capacity and implement a successful, end to end research management environment.

— Enhancing workflow visibility in research contract management: A practice-based reflection

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¹University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Biography:

Charelise van Staden holds a Master's degree in Public Administration and Management and works in research development with a focus on research contract administration. Her work centers on supporting effective research management processes and improving internal systems that facilitate the coordination and tracking of research agreements.

Research contract management within higher education institutions often involves multiple stakeholders, including academic staff, legal services, finance departments, and external partners. Limited visibility across these stages can lead to delays, fragmented communication, and reactive follow-ups.

This abstract reflects on the implementation of a structured contract tracking tool developed within the UFS Research Development office to improve oversight and workflow clarity. During a transitional period of role familiarisation, gaps in process visibility became evident, particularly in monitoring contract status and responding efficiently to contract queries. In response, a centralised tracking spreadsheet was introduced to categorise workflow stages, assign responsibility, and record follow-up actions.

While simple in design, the tool enhanced transparency across the contract lifecycle and enabled more proactive management of agreements. Observed outcomes included improved response times, reduced risk of missed follow-ups, clearer status reporting, ensured compliance, adherence to research reporting deadlines, and increased confidence in role execution. Currently implemented as an internal tool within the DRD office, this workflow tracker offers opportunities for future digital adaptation, potentially enabling researchers to access real-time contract status directly, reducing email follow-ups, and further enhancing transparency and stakeholder engagement.

This practice-based reflection highlights how accessible, low-cost process interventions can strengthen research governance and operational efficiency. The experience underscores the value of structured workflow visibility in supporting both institutional compliance and researcher service, aligning with the SARIMA 2026 conference theme of Resilient Futures: Reimagining Research and Innovation Management for Impact and Inclusion.

— From silos to systems: A practical model for integrated communication in research units

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¹Wits Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA), Johannesburg, South Africa

Biography:

Theranne van Vuren is a senior research management leader at the Wits Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA) Research Unit in Johannesburg, South Africa. She provides strategic oversight of grants, finance, governance, compliance, and shared services within a complex donor-funded health research environment. Her work focuses on strengthening institutional systems that enable responsible research practices, resilient partnerships, and measurable societal impact. Theranne has a particular interest in digital transformation, equitable collaboration, and integrated organisational communication that aligns research strategy, operations, and stakeholder engagement across the research lifecycle within the African research management ecosystem.

Research impact depends not only on scientific excellence but on how effectively people, processes, and information flow across an organisation. In multi-disciplinary and multi-site research units, fragmentation between grants, HR, finance, operations, communications, and investigators can delay implementation and dilute impact.

This poster presents a practical, field-tested model of integrated organisational communication developed within the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics (VIDA) Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand. The model aligns operational processes with strategic communication planning to enable research delivery in resource-constrained and donor-driven contexts.

Key components include:

- A structured onboarding and offboarding workflow linking line managers, HR, IT, and grants
- A centralised internal communications calendar balancing operational reminders, compliance messaging, and culture-building
- Monthly cross-functional alignment meetings
- Study start-up process flows integrating protocol review, feasibility, compliance, and logistics
- Community engagement communication loops to ensure bidirectional accountability

The poster outlines implementation steps, governance considerations, and low-cost tools for operationalising the model.

Preliminary internal indicators suggest improvements in cross-departmental response times, clearer role accountability, improved staff engagement, and enhanced readiness for audits and site visits.

By reframing communication as an enabling pathway rather than a support service, this model demonstrates how research management professionals can measure and strengthen the systems that enable impact.

The poster provides a visual framework, implementation checklist, and measurable indicators that delegates can adapt to their own institutional contexts.