AREN Local Network Leads (LNLs) Training Program

Building Open Science leadership and locally-led communities of practice across Africa

April – December 2026

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Programme Overview

The African Reproducibility Network (AREN) Local Network Leads (LNLs) Training Programme is an intensive, capacity-building and leadership programme designed to empower Africa-based grassroots researchers and research professionals to champion Open Science and reproducible research within their institutions and communities. The programme aims to cultivate a cohort of African Open Science leaders who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and support needed to influence research culture, strengthen institutional practices, and contribute African perspectives to the global Open Science movement.

The LNLs Programme follows a three-level progression model, moving from foundational knowledge to practical implementation and finally to community leadership and institutional engagement. Participants begin at Level 1 and progress to subsequent levels upon meeting attendance and assignment requirements.

The programme is delivered fully online to enable participation from grassroots researchers across multiple African countries and time zones. All training sessions, discussions, and activities are conducted virtually.

The 2026 iteration of the program will be delivered over nine months (April–December 2026). Applications for the 2026 cohort close on 16 March 2026. Selected applicants will be contacted via email.

Objectives and Rationale

While several training initiatives existed before the launch of AREN's training program in 2024, many lacked the scope, continued engagement, and community support needed to ensure trainees had a sustainable impact beyond the training period. AREN's training program was designed to bridge this gap by providing a holistic learning and engagement structure that equips and supports trainees to lead change within their institutions and research communities sustainably.

The LNLs Training Programme exists to:
- Build local leadership capacity for Open Science and Reproducible Research across African institutions
- Support the establishment and strengthening of local open science communities of practice (local networks) at African universities and research performing organisations
- Equip participants with both theoretical understanding and practical skills on open science and reproducible research
- Foster a supportive, pan-African community of practitioners and advocates
- Ensure that African voices and priorities are visible in global Open Science discussions and policies

Local Networks

Local Networks are communities of practice established within universities or research institutions to support engagement with Open Science and reproducible research. They

provide a platform for training activities, workshops, peer learning, and discussion, and aim to foster collaboration around improving research practices within local institutional contexts.

Local Networks may take different forms depending on institutional readiness and support:

- Open Science Nodes are informal networks that enable grassroots researchers and research support staff to meet, collaborate, and promote good research practices without requiring official institutional recognition. Nodes are particularly suitable in contexts where senior management support is limited or where formal recognition is not yet feasible. Nodes are usually smaller and can be centred on a university department, college, or research lab. They are ideal for initial engagement before scaling up.
- Open Science Hubs are local networks that are formally recognised by their host institutions. In these cases, the Local Network Lead may work alongside an additional institutional or management-level contact (Institutional Lead) to support engagement with university or research institute leadership and to help integrate Open Science and reproducibility considerations into institutional strategies and policies. Hubs are typically larger in scale and may comprise several departments, units, or research labs.

Both Nodes and Hubs are valid and valuable models. The choice of structure should reflect local context, institutional culture, and available support, and networks may evolve from Nodes into Hubs over time.

Open Science Hubs may, over time, evolve into formal Open Science Offices or Units embedded within the institution's research support structure.

Local Network Leads (LNLs)

Local Network Leads (LNLs) act as institutional focal points for Open Science and reproducible research within their host organisations and serve as part of AREN's wider pan-African network.

LNLs are responsible for:

- Building and supporting a multidisciplinary local network that includes researchers and research support staff across career stages
- Representing AREN and promoting Open Science and reproducible research principles within their institution
- Identifying individuals and groups interested in improving research culture and practices
- Initiating and coordinating local activities such as workshops, discussions, or awareness-raising events
- Facilitating knowledge sharing and encouraging the adoption of good research practices within their local networks

LNLs are not expected to act alone or to drive institutional change without support. The programme is designed to equip LNLs with the skills, confidence, and community connections needed to engage constructively within their local contexts, recognising that institutional change is gradual and context-dependent.

Programme Structure: A Three-Level Model

The Local Network Leads (LNLs) Training Programme is intentionally designed as a three-level, progressive programme delivered over several months. The 2026 iteration will be delivered virtually over a 9-month period. This structure reflects the understanding that meaningful engagement with Open Science requires more than awareness alone — it requires time, practice, reflection, and increasing responsibility.

Each level builds on the previous one and serves a distinct purpose:

Level 1 – Foundations of Open Science (April–June)

Level 1 focuses on establishing a shared foundational understanding of Open Science and reproducible research. Participants are introduced to key concepts, principles, and practices, as well as the motivations, benefits, and challenges of adopting Open Science within diverse research and institutional contexts. This level ensures that all participants, regardless of prior experience, develop a common language and baseline knowledge before moving into more applied and leadership-oriented content.

Level 2 – Applying Open Science in Practice (July–September)

Level 2 shifts the focus from principles to practical application. Participants explore how Open Science practices can be implemented in real research workflows, institutional settings, and disciplinary contexts. This includes hands-on engagement with tools, platforms, and case studies relevant to Open Science implementation. The aim of this level is to build confidence and practical competence, enabling participants to translate Open Science principles into actionable practices within their own institutions and communities.

Level 3 – Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Building (October–December)

Level 3 focuses on leadership and sustainability. Participants develop skills related to advocacy, training delivery, community management, and institutional engagement. This level supports participants in preparing to initiate, grow, or strengthen local Open Science networks, and in navigating institutional structures and resistance constructively. By the end of Level 3, participants are expected to be equipped not only with knowledge and tools, but also with the confidence and strategic understanding needed to act as Local Network Leads within their institutions.

Participation in the programme begins at Level 1. Progression to Levels 2 and 3 is conditional upon meeting the attendance and assignment requirements outlined later in this document.

Training Schedule and Topics

Across the three levels, the programme covers a range of core Open Science topics, including (but not limited to):

- Open access and scholarly publishing
- Preprints, preregistration, and registered reports
- Open data, open methods, and reproducible workflows
- Responsible research assessment and research evaluation
- Research infrastructure and Open Science tools
- Community building and institutional engagement

- Leadership, advocacy, and change management

Training is delivered through a combination of virtual live interactive sessions, practical assignments, asynchronous learning materials, and peer discussion.

Training times and days will be determined by the trainers' availability. While AREN will aim to keep schedules as consistent and accessible as possible, time zone differences mean that sessions may not suit everyone equally.

NB: All live sessions are recorded, and recordings are shared with participants to accommodate time zone differences and professional commitments.

Time Commitment and Engagement Expectations

Participants should expect to dedicate up to six hours per week (maximum) to programme activities. This may include:
- Attending live training sessions
- Completing assignments and practical activities
- Auditing recorded content and training materials, if you miss a live session
- Participating in discussions or feedback activities

The programme is designed to be intensive yet flexible, recognising the diverse professional responsibilities of participants.

Assignments and Progression Requirements

To successfully complete each level of the programme and be eligible to progress to the next level, participants are required to:
- Attend at least 50% of the live sessions delivered within that level, and
- Complete at least 90% of the required assignments and activities associated with that level.

Assignments are Short, reflective or practical activities designed to support learning and progression through the programme.

Failure to meet these requirements may result in non-progression to the next level.

Eligibility

The primary goal of the LNLs Training Programme is to support the establishment and strengthening of local networks (communities of practice) within African universities and research institutions. As such, eligibility is restricted to individuals who are positioned to have sustained institutional impact.

Eligible applicants must:
- Be permanently employed at an Africa-based university, research institute, or related organisation, or

- Hold a fixed-term contract with sufficient remaining duration to allow post-training engagement.

Eligible roles may include academic staff, research staff, library and research support professionals, and individuals in research management or leadership roles within public or private research institutions.

The programme is not open to undergraduate or postgraduate students whose affiliation with an institution is temporary.

Selection Criteria

Selection to the LNLs Training Programme is competitive and based on a holistic review of applications. In line with AREN's mission, we aim to form a cohort that reflects the diversity of the African research ecosystem, including representation across disciplines, countries and regions, institutional roles, and career stages, while striving for gender balance.

Beyond eligibility, applications are assessed based on:
- demonstrated motivation to engage with and advance Open Science practices,
- leadership potential and capacity to influence change within an institutional or community context,
- the applicant's institutional embeddedness and ability to sustain Open Science initiatives beyond the programme,
- and the applicant's ability to commit to the programme's attendance and assignment requirements.

While prior experience with Open Science is not required, applicants should demonstrate a clear interest in applying the training within their institutional context and contributing to local or regional Open Science efforts following the programme.

Code of Conduct and Participation Expectations

The LNLs Training Programme is committed to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. Participants are expected to:
- Engage respectfully with trainers and fellow participants
- Use inclusive and professional language
- Respect differing perspectives and institutional contexts
- Contribute constructively to discussions and collaborative activities

Discriminatory, harassing, or disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated. AREN reserves the right to take appropriate action in response to violations of this code of conduct.

Scope and Limitations of the Programme

The LNLs Training Programme provides training, mentorship, and community support, but it does not offer:
- Financial compensation, salaries, or stipends
- Guaranteed institutional recognition or promotion

- Authority to enforce institutional policy change

While AREN may support dialogue with host institutions where feasible, institutional responses to Open Science initiatives may vary depending on local contexts and priorities.

Engagement Beyond the Programme

The primary goal of the LNLs Training Programme is to support participants in initiating and sustaining Local Open Science or reproducibility networks within their institutions or research communities. Participants who successfully complete the programme are therefore expected to take concrete steps toward establishing or actively supporting a Local Network (as a Node or a Hub), in line with their local context and capacity.

All participants who successfully complete the programme and meet the progression requirements will be formally recognised as AREN Local Network Leads (LNLs) and will be featured on the AREN website as part of the wider AREN network. This recognition acknowledges their role, increases visibility, and supports collaboration across institutions and regions.

Continued engagement with AREN, as part of maintaining and supporting a Local Network, is an essential component of the Local Network Lead role. This engagement may take different forms, including organising or contributing to local activities, participating in AREN community spaces, sharing experiences, or engaging in collaborative initiatives. AREN recognises that institutional change is gradual and context-dependent, and that the form and intensity of engagement may vary across participants and institutions.

Conclusion

The LNLs Training Programme is designed to empower Africa-based grassroots researchers and research professionals to become effective Open Science leaders, grounded in their local contexts and connected to a global movement.

By combining structured training, practical application, and a supportive community, AREN seeks to strengthen Open Science practices across Africa while ensuring that African perspectives meaningfully shape the future of global research.

FAQs

If you have any questions, kindly refer to the FAQ section. If your question is not answered there, you can send an email to us at africanrepro@gmail.com or team@africanrn.org.

Are undergraduates qualified to apply?
No, current undergraduates are not qualified to apply. However, individuals with undergraduate degrees who work at universities or research institutes and will be in the role for a minimum of two years after completing the training program are eligible to apply.

Does a lack of experience or engagement in open science activities put me at a disadvantage?

No, prior experience or engagement in open science activities is not a major selection criterion and we look at several factors in the application during the selection process. However, individuals with such experience have it to their advantage.

Is there a specific number of trainees that will be accepted to the program?

No. There is no allocated quota of individuals who will be admitted to the program. However, based on our selection criteria, preference may be given to some applicants over others, resulting in a reduced number of trainees compared to the total number of applicants.

I work remotely at my institution. Can I apply?

Local Network Leads are expected to be physically present at the institution/organisation and engage directly with community members and researchers at the institution. As such, individuals who work remotely are not ideal for the role. However, under certain circumstances, a remote worker can be considered for the training program so we encourage you to apply.

Can there be more than one Local Network Lead at an institution?

Yes. An institution may have one or more LNLs, depending on local factors such as the scale and diversity of research at the institution. LNLs at an institution are expected to work closely together to ensure their activities are properly coordinated.

Can non-African nationals apply to the programme?

Yes. Researchers and research professionals who are not of African nationality but are currently based at an African university or research institute and hold a permanent or long-term position are eligible to apply. The programme focuses on strengthening grassroots Open Science and reproducibility efforts within African institutions. Therefore, eligibility is determined by institutional affiliation and capacity to establish or support a local network within an African institution, rather than nationality.

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