

**The American Society for Public Administration 2025 Annual Conference
March 28 -April 1, 2025 | Washington D.C.**

Not Robotics Yet: Keeping Public Servants in Public Service

SECTION ON AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (SAPA) SYMPOSIUM

CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS



“Keeping African Public Servants in Public Service --

“Unleashing the Power of People and Technology on The African Continent”

Aligned with the 2025 ASPA Annual Conference theme, “Not Robots Yet: Keeping Public Servants in Public Service,” the Section on African Public Administration (SAPA) invites members to submit their paper proposals under the broad framework of intersectionality between governance, development, people, and the role of emergent technologies in the context of the African public administration systems. The Section asks its members and future members to submit their research considering the above proposed overarching themes. The call is diverse in its scope and breadth in reflection of the vastness of the African continent.

Adopting and harnessing advancements in digital revolutions and innovations take on a different meaning on the continent. Emerging technologies are having a powerful impact on the public service of African states. The digital revolution’s promises to improve public service, productivity, accountability, and ultimately prosperity and stability on the continent will not be determined by the mere technological adoptions as much as by how they are used to achieve greater public service, stability, and prosperity (Brookings, 2020, 2021). As the continent with the youngest average age, we notice a vibrant youth population emerging in a world already immersed in transnational technological developments. The advancements in information, communication, and technology juxtaposed with past underinvestment of traditional information infrastructure have created an unusual opportunity to “leapfrog” development as countries are not beholden to the capital asset liabilities of past long-term investments. Rather, the continent can “leapfrog” development by tapping into current advanced technologies to bypass linear paths to modernization (World Bank 2017; Cilliers 2021). The potential to harness the positive externalities of such an approach to tools and modes of public sector governance is what excites the continent.

The future is exciting as it inevitably immerses us in an era of advanced developments in technology (NAPA 2019; Jaldi 2023). However, there are still traditional public administration challenges on the continent. SAPA's past symposia and its ensuing research point to on-going and persistent challenges. These include, 1) the need to enrich human capital via heightened professionalization, 2) ensure improved leadership to set foot and establish relevant, feasible, and timely key performance indicators, and 3) effectively delivering public service. SAPA community encourages and asks for more and timely research on understudied aspects related to these topics. This includes studies on middle-level managers in service delivery.

The above mentioned topics are tightly integrated with traditional public administration scholarship. They ask how existing theories and frameworks are generalizable or fail to translate in a different set of institutions with different historical trajectories and cultural interpretations. Thus, they ask both how established theories such as street-level bureaucracy literature lend insight to issues at hand and how they only offer glimpses to a fragment of the issue under examination. It asks whether key components of existing scholarship are lost in translation as basic critical foundational assumptions are lost with variation in citizen trust toward existing public service, variation in legitimacy and effectiveness of ethics and accountability institutions, and the civic environment supporting the growth and influence of nonprofit organizations.

Politics still loom large in administrative operations on the continent raising questions on how administrative effectiveness is ensured in a setting that does not share the unique politics-administration dichotomy polemic experienced in the U.S. and elsewhere. It once again raises the question of how effective existing paradigms fit to address challenges public administrators face on the African continent. For example, this aspect is carried in discussions regarding regulations on artificial intelligence (Sulaiman and Olen 2024). It is a constant and recurring theme for SAPA and reflects the section's contribution to the broader ASPA community of scholars, including bringing to the conversation contextualized insights and propositions from our counterparts on the continent. We ask all current and future members to support the synergy in the field with your abstracts for the coming SAPA 2025 symposium.

To catalyze these important discussions, we propose the following questions grouped under the following tracks:

Track I: African PA Professionalization in the AI Era - Human Capital, Leadership, and Public Service

- Who is the public servant in an era of heightened digitalization and automation?
- How different artificial intelligence-driven public service is from the traditional model?
- How can we harness technology in the human capital development efforts?
- How can we utilize and leverage technological advancements to rethink public service delivery?
- What is the current state of research and literature on the technology-driven paradigmatic shift? In the US, on the African continent and globally.

Track II: Leapfrogging AI Powered Innovations for Service Delivery and Accountability

- What is driving the supply-side vs demand side argument for accelerated AI adoptions in enhancing public service? What is the degree of AI adoption in African PA systems?
- How are investments channeled in technological advancement? How digital AI platforms are funded, developed, implemented, and used?
- What can be said about African citizen's adoption readiness of technological advancement?
- How do AI powered innovations constitute new opportunities and means for advancing public service delivery and improving accountability?
- How does urban/rural divide impact the era of heightened digitalization and automation?
- Where can things go wrong? Lessons Learnt and Comparative Insights.
- What are the pros and cons of large-scale adoption of AI?

Track III: African Current Regulatory Frameworks and Challenges in the AI Era

- What do African constitutions and legislative frameworks say about public service accountability and regulations in the AI era?
- What are the ethical and accessibility challenges associated with increased AI adoption in public service?
- Who may be left behind in the AI era?
- Is artificial intelligence a positive force in democratization efforts? Any challenges?

Track IV: Africa's Fourth Industrial Revolutions: Lessons Learnt, Research Implications

- What constitutes "successful" AI-adoptions with positive outcomes on public service effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness and accountability?
- What are some of the challenges to reckon with and overcome?
- What can be said about leading and managing the transition in the AI transformed public service?
- Youth and technological innovations?

Track V: Africa as the Next Frontier for Socio-Economic Innovation and Creativity

- How is Africa harnessing youth-spearheaded innovation to governance?
- What are the role of academic and practitioners in developing pragmatic AI curricula for human capacity development?
- What AI training programs exist for public managers and engaged citizens?

Submission Protocol for Paper Proposals

SAPA Academic Affairs Committee welcomes the submission of proposals for individual papers and fully formed panels in alignment with the SAPA 2025 Annual Symposium theme. Please note that the SAPA Symposium will run all day on March 28, 2025. We need your active participation to make it a successful event. Please submit your proposal to Dr. Shin Kue Ryu, SAPA Academic Affairs Committee Chair (ryushin@isu.edu), keeping in copy the Section Chair, Dr. Rym Kaki (rym@usc.edu).

Dissemination of high-quality conceptual, theoretical, empirical, policy- and practice-oriented research is strongly expected. All proposals should: 1) briefly explain how the paper or panel connects to the overall Symposium theme; 2) note the individual conference track in which the proposal best fits; 3) include 3-4 keywords, and 4) provide complete contact information for the corresponding individual. Proposals for individual papers should include an abstract of 250-400 words. Proposals for fully formed panels should consist of three to four complementary papers and include an abstract of 400-600 words.

The submission deadline is **October 30, 2024**. Review of SAPA Symposium proposal submissions will begin on October 1st, 2024, and continue through December 8, 2024. SAPA is obligated to submit the complete symposium proposal by **December 15, 2024**, to the ASPA Secretariat. The high-quality papers presented at the Symposium will be considered for publication in either a special co-edited issue of AJPAM (e-edition) and/or an edited volume. AJPAM is the African Journal of Public Administration and Management.

Note: kindly note that ASPA 2025 annual conference is a strictly in-person event. We ask everyone to make the necessary arrangements with their respective institutions to make the in-person attendance possible. We are excited that ASPA is heading back to Washington, D.C. I hope you will join us there! Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Dr. Shin Kue Ryu (ryushin@isu.edu), SAPA Academic Affairs Chair or Dr. Rym Kaki (rym@usc.edu), the Section Chair.

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