The American Society for Public Administration 2026 Annual Conference
March 20-24, 2026|Hollywood, CA

Building a Bridge to Renewal & Resilience

SECTION ON AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (SAPA) SYMPOSIUM

CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS

"Continuity and Change in Public Administration: Building a Bridge to Africa's Futures"

ASPA's theme

ASPA's 2026 annual conference, scheduled for Hollywood, California, is appropriately themed, "Building a Bridge to Renewal and Resilience" in public administration and policy (https://aspanet.secure-platform.com/a/page/Conference26). Renewal and resilience are soothing terms, but they are also euphemistic. It is argued that in times of crisis and uncertainty, public administration can hold steady and provide guidance for stability in public service production and delivery, along with self-reflexive public service research, theory, teaching, and practice. In that sense, it is soothing that the field stood firm in the most recent threat to human lives and livelihoods posed by COVID-19. And yet the field faces seismic change due to the continuing threats posed by AI revolutions, climate change, and demographic shifts, on the one hand, and geopolitical tensions, rivalry, conflict, discontinuity, and democratic backsliding, on the other. The relatively benign description of renewal and resiliency masks the changes to both landscape and paradigms faced in our current generation and beyond. How does the field respond? ASPA's call for proposals invites scholars, researchers, students, and practitioners to reflect on our collective experiences and lessons by addressing seven themes and perspectives aimed to reinvigorate and propel the field forward in the spirit of astute "renewal and resilience" in recognition that governance as business is insufficient in today's times.

SAPA's theme[1]

SAPA's members are excited to be able to explore the theme of astute renewal and resilience, which resonates with our cherished goal of promoting research and sharing knowledge, norms, and values anchored to effective, equitable, and responsive governance primarily in African countries. We will do so under the organizing theme, "Continuity and Change in African Public Administration," a theme that will enable us to look back while moving forward with the rest of the field. In a survey of the field (Guy & Rubin, 2015), several issues, trends, and patterns are highlighted, including changes from intra-governmental to intersectoral, from trust to doubt, from local to global, from silos to networks,

and from output to outcome, among others. This snapshot view portrays a field facing rapid change and transition. However, Guy and Rubin's edited volume also raises grand issues such as the form that the field should take to serve the public and become more responsive and legitimate. Likewise, in a careful analysis of publications in *Public Administration and Development*, Elliott et al. (2024) highlight thematic changes framing the discourse in African public administration, ranging from development, local governance, training and development, decentralization, capacity building, and sustainable development, among others.

Taking advantage of this vibrant administrative landscape, and given Agenda 2063 for change and transformation, as well as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (African Union, 2013), we request colleagues and all those interested in our symposium to take a step back and explore the following grand challenges and issues of theoretical and practical consequences: (1) if, as historians claim, the only constant in history is change,[2] what have African countries learned from their experiences with administrative transformations? (2) What models of change have worked to strengthen broad public participation, and what models have not, and why? (3) What themes are worth research attention? (4) How can scholars, researchers, and practitioners use the lessons learned from the implementation of administrative changes to build a bridge to Africa's futures? (5) Where are the research, theory, and practice gaps in the development setting, and how can they be productively addressed? (6) What kind of knowledge, skill, and ability do practitioners need to help build a bridge to astute renewal and resilience, and what will such a bridge look like? (7) Lastly, what does the future of African public administration look like in a new multi-polar world?

Track details & submission guidance

Five interrelated tracks will help us explore our theme and guide our discussions, as elaborated below. We are interested in promoting integration, interdisciplinarity, "methodological pluralism," "epistemic justice," and decolonial narratives to advance knowledge and understanding of African public administration as science, craft, and profession. They can be narrative inquiry, cultural analysis, case analysis, empirical analysis, or comparative analysis prepared for fully formed panels, round-table discussions, or individual presentations.

1. **Redefining the Concept of "Development" for African public administration:**
   o How have we understood and defined the concept of development in the context of the continent of Africa, both in scholarship and in practice?
   o How can we reframe "development" through context-sensitive, indigenous, and decolonial lenses for epistemic justice?
   o How are the current changes in international, multilateral, and bilateral development impacting global cooperation on PA systems in Africa?
   o How can we produce PA theories and curricula that better match African realities and improve policy legitimacy?

2. **Community and Collaborative Governance:**
   o What, and how does, state-society-private sector partnerships harness local knowledge and foster trust networks in the African continent?

- How is community/collaborative governance situated in development dialogues within Africa?
- What scholarly lessons can be derived from a better understanding of how collaborative governance unfolds on the African continent?
- How do community/collaborative public networks shape the renewal and resilience dialogue in Africa?
- What exemplary co-production exists that improves inclusiveness, responsiveness, and outcomes where capacity is thin?

3. **Public Service Delivery in Disruptive Contexts**
   - What replicable models are in Africa that maintain essential services amid conflict, pandemics, and climate shocks?
   - How do street-level bureaucrats respond and adjust under crisis conditions, especially considering reversals/challenges/retractions in democratic governance?
   - What and how do socio-cultural factors, such as social capital, manifest or get triggered during times of emergency in Africa?
   - How do bureaucrats navigate governance disruptions while practicing accountability? How do we elevate innovation and adaptive accountability that preserves state legitimacy in crises?

4. **Sustainable Development and Climate Governance**:
   - How does the African PA scholarship and practitioner community integrate sustainable development agendas?
   - How is democratic participation and partnerships integrated in sustainable development initiatives in Africa?
   - What quality of life indicators are African PA systems succeeding on, and what still are lagging relative to the world that requires greater attention?
   - How do we integrate climate adaptation/mitigation, food security, and environmental justice into PA practice?
   - What local government leadership and participatory approaches operate in Africa that align with Agenda 2063 and SDGs?

5. **Digital Governance & AI**
   - What is the status of African governments' adoption of technology with ongoing innovations in the Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) sector?
   - What opportunities, barriers, and risks exist for African countries in harnessing and building partnerships on developments in ICT, recognizing the urban-rural disparity?
   - What is the role of civil service academies and universities in talent development, i.e. are there similar Friedrich-Finer debates in Africa?
   - What technology management models operate in Africa, particularly with AI technologies and expanding digital governance? What can be said about the current African governance frameworks for data protection, accountability, and digital equity?

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 2026 Annual Symposium theme. Please note that the SAPA Symposium will run all day on March 20, 2026. 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), ccing 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 **31, 2025.** Review of SAPA Symposium proposal submissions will begin on November 1st, 2025, and continue through November 21st, 2025**.** SAPA is obligated to submit the complete symposium proposal by **December 15, 2025,** to the ASPA Secretariat.

References

African Union. (2013). Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview: Retrieved, Friday, August 15, 2025.

American Society for Public Administration. (2025). https://www.aspanet.org/ASPA/ASPA/Events/Annual-Conference/2026-ACTracks-Theme.aspx Retrieved: Friday, August 15, 2025.

Guy, E. M., & Rubin, M. M. (2015). *Public Administration Evolving: From Foundations to the Future*. Routledge.

Elliott. I. C., Puppim de Oliveira, J. A., & Wu, A. M. (2024). Public Administration in (Historical) Perspective. *Public Administration and Development*. DOI: 10.1002/pad.2052.

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Note

1 Peter F. Haruna, Professor & MPA/CPM Director at Texas A&M International University, led in the drafting of this year's CFP with additional contributions from Shin Kue Ryu, Associate Professor & Department Chair at Idaho State University, Kaki Rym, Professor (Teaching) & Director of Sol Price International Public Policy and Management Program at the University of Southern California and Gedeon Mudacumura, Professor Emeritus of Public Administration and Founder of the Interdisciplinary Action Research Center.

2 Heraclitus, one of the preeminent Greek pre-Socratic philosophers, is quoted as saying that "life is flux," meaning that the only constant in history is change (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 61). In his view, one can attach oneself to anything, but one must be aware that it is ever-changing.

For further information on SAPA previous symposia themes visit: https://thesapa.org/conferences/
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