

Report on the Southeast Asia Researcher Career Development Workshop

Date: February 18-20, 2025

Location: Bangkok, Thailand

Organizers: Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS), Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI)

The Southeast Asia Researcher Career Development Workshop was a significant initiative aimed at supporting early- and mid-career researchers by fostering professional networks, sharing best practices, and providing guidance on securing research funding. The workshop was designed to equip participants with the necessary skills to advance their careers in biomedical and health research. It included interactive sessions focused on networking, grant writing, community engagement, and pitching for funding. These activities were structured to enhance participants' ability to navigate the research funding landscape and improve their capacity for securing financial support for their projects.

A key objective of the workshop was to establish new professional networks among researchers from Southeast Asia and beyond. The event provided a platform for knowledge exchange, enabling participants to engage with international funders and fellow researchers. Through various discussions and exercises, attendees gained practical training on grant writing, funding strategies, and research communication. Ultimately, the workshop aimed to enhance the research community's ability to access financial support, align projects with funding priorities, and develop effective proposals that could secure competitive grants.

The event was organized by the Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS) and Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), with significant contributions from major research and funding organizations. Among these were the Wellcome Trust, which supports global health research; the British Academy, which funds humanities and social sciences research; the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI), Thailand's national health research agency; and eAsia, an organization dedicated to fostering cross-border research collaborations. The workshop featured insights from distinguished speakers and facilitators, including Professor Guy Thwaites from Oxford University Clinical Research Unit, Associate Professor Nor Azian Abdul Murad from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Dr. Raksha Pandya-Wood from Monash University Malaysia, and Professor Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam from Sunway University. These experts shared their knowledge and experiences, helping participants to gain a deeper understanding of the funding landscape and develop essential skills for advancing their research careers.

Summary of Daily Activities

The first day of the workshop focused on networking and funding opportunities. The event began with opening remarks from representatives of AMS, TSRI, and partner organizations, setting the stage for a series of interactive sessions. The networking segment, facilitated by Dr. Hani Syahida Binti Salim and Dr. Alice Ferrer, provided participants with strategies for collaboration and engagement with potential research partners. The highlight of the day was a panel discussion featuring representatives from Wellcome Trust, the British Academy, eAsia, and HSRI. Each organization presented its funding priorities, eligibility criteria, and application processes, offering participants valuable insights into the funding landscape. The day concluded with a discussion on common mistakes in grant applications, led by Joana A. America from DOST-PCHRD. This session emphasized the importance of aligning research proposals with funding priorities, avoiding duplication, ensuring methodological rigor, and preparing sustainable and well-justified budgets. The first day ended with a networking reception, allowing participants to establish meaningful connections with funders and fellow researchers.

The second day of the workshop was dedicated to grant writing, with sessions facilitated by Katrina Lawson from OUCRU Vietnam. Participants explored the fundamental aspects of crafting compelling grant applications, including clarity in proposal writing, setting well-defined objectives, and structuring research abstracts. The workshop introduced the Heilmeier's Catechism framework to help researchers evaluate and refine their ideas by addressing key questions related to objectives, innovation, relevance, impact, challenges, budget, and timeline. Another session focused on setting SMART goals to ensure that research objectives were specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Budgeting and cost justification were also key components of the day's activities, with discussions on full economic costing, indirect costs, and exchange rate considerations for international collaborations. The final segment of the day emphasized the importance of communicating research impact, with participants learning how to articulate the significance of their work in a way that aligns with funders' expectations. A panel discussion provided additional insights into aligning proposals with funding priorities and addressing challenges in the grant application process.

The third and final day of the workshop covered community engagement in research and the art of pitching for funding. Dr. Raksha Pandya-Wood led an engaging discussion on the policy, ethics, and practice of community involvement in research. Participants explored how active community participation strengthens evidence-based policymaking and

enhances research impact. The session included a case study on the effects of floods on schoolchildren in Malaysia, illustrating how ethical and practical engagement strategies can shape research outcomes. The afternoon session, led by Professor Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam, focused on effective pitching techniques. Researchers were introduced to the essential components of a successful pitch, including crafting a compelling introduction, clearly presenting the research problem and proposed solution, and emphasizing impact. Participants took part in interactive exercises such as the Cereal Box Challenge, which encouraged them to create a visual representation of their research ideas, and the Speed Dating Pitching exercise, where they practiced delivering concise pitches to different partners for feedback. The workshop concluded with final reflections from the co-chairs, summarizing key takeaways and encouraging participants to apply the lessons learned in their future research endeavors.

The workshop provided participants with a wealth of knowledge and practical skills that will help them advance their research careers. One of the most valuable aspects of the event was the opportunity to establish strong professional networks with funders and fellow researchers. The connections formed during the workshop have the potential to lead to future collaborations and multidisciplinary research projects. Additionally, the grant writing sessions significantly improved participants' understanding of the application process. Researchers gained insights into structuring proposals, aligning projects with funder priorities, and crafting compelling justifications for their budgets. The skills acquired will enhance their ability to secure funding and increase the success rate of their grant applications.

Another key benefit was the enhancement of communication and engagement skills. The pitching workshop provided researchers with techniques to present their work persuasively, while the community engagement session emphasized the importance of involving local communities in research. Understanding these elements will allow researchers to create more impactful projects that are both scientifically rigorous and socially relevant.

Beyond technical skills, the workshop also increased awareness of various funding opportunities. Participants learned about different grant schemes, eligibility criteria, and common pitfalls that could lead to proposal rejection. By equipping researchers with this knowledge, the workshop empowered them to navigate the funding landscape more effectively and take proactive steps toward securing financial support for their projects.

The Southeast Asia Researcher Career Development Workshop was a resounding success, providing researchers with essential skills and connections to advance their careers. The event facilitated knowledge exchange, improved grant writing capabilities, and fostered a collaborative research community. To build on the success of this workshop, future iterations should consider incorporating one-on-one mentoring sessions with funders to provide more personalized guidance. Additional hands-on grant writing exercises with real-time feedback would further enhance participants' skills. Organizing follow-up virtual sessions would also help track participants' progress and maintain engagement with funding organizations. Strengthening regional research collaborations through ongoing peer support networks would be another valuable addition. By implementing these recommendations, future workshops can continue to support the professional growth of researchers and contribute to a stronger and more connected research ecosystem in Southeast Asia.