

The TReND in Africa

Online Collaboration Guideline

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The framework

This program will run as a series of online interactions between experts and partners (the duration and frequency are to be decided by the expert and the partner at the beginning of the collaboration, see below) because of the diversity of the projects (partners have different goals, areas of expertise, etc) each project will follow its natural course of development.

A note on collaboration

Collaboration is one of the cores of scientific work, and they can be as small as three graduate students working together in a project, all the way up to the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), where institutions from many countries are putting together resources and work from many different people over decades.

They are a great tool to develop amazing work, but we need to understand that they require extra thought and preparation. You are, after all, going to work with another researcher that will likely have a different cultural background, different life history, as well as their own expectations and methods of working.

Science has published a nice piece a while ago on the [topic](#), please take a moment to read it!

Collaborating

This is the first iteration of TReND's online collaboration program, so we warmly welcome suggestions, criticism and feedback!

Here are the steps we are proposing for a successful collaboration:

Preparing the core of the collaboration

Partner and volunteer meet online (this can be by zoom, skype and etc) for the first time. In this first meeting they get to know one another and start deciding on which project they want to collaborate on:

- It should have a clear stated goal (if you can define it in a phrase, you've probably boiled down enough (e.g., "we will work on a system to automate data analysis on X").
- This "design" phase should take 1-2 weeks.

Breaking down the work into steps

Once you have decided what to work on, break it down into actionable steps that can be done in defined periods of time. At the end of each period, both parties have an online call to see how things are and if the next steps are still making sense.

- The recommendation is for these periods to be 1-2 weeks long
- The number of steps you have and their interval is going to define how long this initial collaboration lasts.

This should be documented and shared with TReND.

Our initial thought is to leverage asynchronous work, where both parties (volunteer and partner) can do their agreed part of the collaboration on their own schedule, as long as it respects the timeframe agreed for the meetings.

Documenting your collaboration

For this program to be successful in the long run, we need to be able to measure the evolution of the collaborations and their outputs. Thus, we recommend all collaborating parties to create a document to be shared with TReND (e.g., as a google doc), so that we can learn about your progress and what things need to be improved/changed for the next groups.

- At every online meeting, make notes, below is a suggestion on what to document:
 - How was working on the goals for the previous week, what worked, what didn't?
 - If a specific point is not going so smoothly, would contacting an expert help? If so, contact TReND and we can call on our networks.
 - What are the goals for the the coming week(s)?
 - How are both parties feeling, are there any issues that need to be addressed?

The actual work

You are now ready to start working! We hope that by following these guidelines both parties will be able to get in a collaborating rhythm that will be enjoyable and set the tone for longer term collaborations. Please keep in mind that this is a pilot program, and that we are here to support all parties along the way!

Concluding the work package

Once you reach the end of the pre-agreed term, TReND would like you to write a small summary of how things went. Initially we thought about a blog format, so that we can share this on our website and have things documented.

Upon completion of this document, TReND will emit completion certificates for both parties.

Both parties are more than welcome to continue collaborating if they wish to do so. TReND's involvement there would also be determined by the collaborating parties.

A couple of observations

The internet in a lot of countries in Africa is not reliable, so your collaboration partner might suggest some late times for your calls, when the Internet works better due to lower traffic.

- online calls weekly or biweekly for 30-60 minutes. In case either side cannot attend a meeting, they should try to tell the other party in advance for rescheduling (or skipping that meeting altogether)
- when more than two cancellations happen, TReND should be notified, as in the case of biweekly meetings this means a "wasted" month. This can be quite frustrating for either party and we want to prevent losing "volunteering energy" and partner engagement!

Roles

Organizer

TReND, represented by the coordinators of the volunteering program, is responsible for:

- Providing all the necessary documentation to volunteers and partners
- Preparing volunteers to “visit” partners
- Preparing partners to “host” volunteers
- Giving assistance with any issues that may arise

Expert

People who sign up for the volunteering program to share their skills with our partners in Africa. They are expected to:

- Read the documentation provided.
- Attend the introductory call with the organizer and the partner.
- Keep up with the online calls and support the assigned partners for the duration of the program. In case this is not possible, the organizers should be warned with enough time to find a replacement (3 weeks would be appreciated, 2 weeks is the minimum time requested)
- Reach out to the organizers whenever:
 - They need help/support to find an additional expert (in case the partners require assistance that is outside of the Volunteer’s expertise).
 - They need assistance with a conflict they were not able to solve, or if the partner goes “missing in action” for two weeks.

Partner

Labs, researchers, undergrad groups from African institutions that signed up to receive a volunteer. They are expected to:

- Keep up with the online calls and document their progress weekly using the templates provided by the program.
 - Missing 2 consecutive calls without contacting the volunteer to let them know and rearranging the calls/evolution of the program will lead to exclusion from the program and future TReND programs.

Additional Experts

Sometimes, volunteers may not have all the necessary knowledge to help their partners. Therefore, we take advantage of TReND’s extended network and offer a pool of “experts”. They can be other volunteers, or partners, or one of TReND’s coordinators. They can be contacted by volunteers to support them with specific topics. Maybe they will just point the volunteer and partners in a certain direction, or they will have a more continued presence, it is all up to the volunteers and partners to decide (and depending, of course, on the expert’s availability).