

Guidelines for implementation of Africa – Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE)

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1. Introduction

The Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence initiative, led by the Africa Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research Universities (The Guild), was officially launched when the first Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE) were established in June 2023.

The CoRE Guidelines compiles documents that were co-developed by ARUA and The Guild to establish and implement this initiative.

In the first phase of Guideline development, eligibility and quality criteria were developed by institutional representatives in both networks for the open call for CoRE proposals in 2023. In the second phase, practical rules for the collaborative work of a CoRE were developed during the first year of implementation of the initiative.

Once fully established, the initiative and its guidelines has been governed by two joint ARUA-The Guild bodies:

- (1) the CoRE Steering Group (made up of institutional representatives at Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Vice-President level from both networks)
- (2) the Academic Co-Lead Group (made up of the academic R&I figures from Africa and Europe who co-lead each CoRE).

Unless explicitly stated, these Guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive because the academics and institutions involved in each CoRE are best placed to make judgments on what is most appropriate for their CoRE's works.

The Guidelines refer to [objectives of the overall initiative](#) which CoREs should make their best efforts to implement in their own collaborative efforts; including commitments towards equitability between African and European R&I collaborators.

2. Criteria for a CoRE

A CoRE is a bespoke, academic-led group of partners in Africa, Europe and beyond. They have 10-year collaboration plans involving research, innovation, education and capacity building activities that are designed to address shared socio-economic and scientific challenges on both continents over the short, medium and long term, as framed in the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

While the initiative is led by universities in ARUA and The Guild, the CoREs are open and inclusive to academic and non-academic organisations beyond these networks if they can make an excellent contribution.

All CoREs will strive for equity in a deeply unequal world by way colleagues make decisions, how they carry out activities together, how funding is allocated across the group and how the credit and value of outputs is shared. Each excellent academic in the CoRE is committed to the change that excellent research and higher education can bring to contribute to building thriving and prosperous societies.

Each CoRE is assessed and selected according to five equally weighted criteria.

1. **Research Excellence**
2. **10-year academic Vision**
3. **Capacity-Building**
4. **Equitable Collaboration**
5. **Funding**

Reflecting the equal importance of the five criteria, CoRE proposals need to score at least 3/5 in each criterion, and at least 20/30 in total to be eligible for recommendation to Presidents and Vice-Chancellors.

The composition of member organisations in a CoRE is flexible to the needs of their mission, therefore the partners are chosen by academics involved in the CoRE and evaluated according to the five CoRE criteria. To be sufficiently collaborative and multilateral, a minimum number of partners are required (3 ARUA, 2 The Guild). Once this minimum is met, partners that are not members of ARUA or The Guild are welcome to participate.

If a CoRE proposal does not meet the minimum number of members required (3 ARUA, 2 The Guild) this must be explicitly justified for approval on a case-by-case basis. Each CoRE can be made up of CoRE member institutions in the following categories (See section 5 for specifications for each category):

- CoRE Co-Leads
- CoRE Partners
- Other Partners

It is essential for each Co-Lead and CoRE Partner institution to allocate appropriate and sufficient institutional support to guarantee a basis for collaborating, equitability and securing further funding over 10 years.

It should be noted that, following the ARUA-Guild Steering Group meeting of 30 September 2024, no new CoRE will be approved, with the possible exception of CoRE that were in development at that time.

3. Principles of CoRE equitability and collaboration

Commitments on principles of collaboration for the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence

ARUA and The Guild developed a series of [recommendations](#) for researchers, universities, funders, and policymakers to foster long-term, sustainable research partnerships based on research excellence, equity, and a dedication to capacity-building. Through our research we aspire to make a transformative difference to supporting our societies; thus, addressing our global and regional challenges in their local contexts. In turn, this is essential to ensure that such local perspectives fully inform how we frame our common societal and scientific challenges.

Through the CoRE initiative, ARUA and The Guild are seeking to implement their vision, framed by the by African Union and the European Union's shared articulation of priority areas in the [AU-EU Innovation Agenda](#). Based on their common positions, and informed by a [growing discussion about the principles of north-south collaboration for equitable partnerships](#) expressed, for instance, in the [Africa Charter for Transformative Collaborations](#), ARUA and The Guild, and our researchers in a CoRE, make the following commitments:

We uphold academic freedom and a joint commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We also uphold our joint commitment to the African Union's Agenda 2063 and its vision toward the African knowledge society. We see the Agenda 2063 as central for the realisation of our Global Sustainable Development goals. It is a pivotal frame through which we identify key research challenges, for the benefit of society. In doing so, our networks are jointly reaffirming our joint, long-term commitment to the future of the most dynamic and demographically young continent. We also express our support of, and commitment to, the EU's Global Gateway, which can only succeed in its impact on the African continent in conjunction with the Agenda 2063, in full recognition of the interdependence of our continents.

Given Africa's low share of global scientific production, we are committed to doing everything we can to improve Africa's scientific capacity. This will help not just African science, but also European and global enquiry – and make a pivotal contribution to the growth of human knowledge.

Researchers in the Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence (CoRE)

All members of the CoRE commit to:

- Research excellence in producing cutting-edge knowledge to the highest standards, based on the highest levels of research integrity
- A fair allocation of research work, based on the recognition of the importance of local knowledge in the analysis of, and solutions to, problems.
- A fair distribution of resources, with a particular focus on strengthening Africa's long-term scientific capacity, within current constraints imposed by funders and national legislation.
- A fair attribution of Intellectual Property, according, for instance, to the [Brunswick Template Agreements](#).
- Building up the human capacity and the technological infrastructure.
- The promotion of brain-circulation
- Accountability and communication about plans, progress, and achievements to each other, their institutions and the secretariats of ARUA/The Guild.

Universities commit to:

- Supporting the CoREs over a 10-year timeframe, with appropriate financial resources as stated in the institutions' original letters of commitment.
- Providing support through the university's human resources and infrastructures, including at the level of research support.
- Being transparent to each other about their commitment in practice.
- Evaluate progress within the objectives set, noting the importance of capacity building, equity and education alongside research output.
- Taking an active part in the governance of the Africa-Europe CoRE initiative, respecting the bottom-up essence of each CoRE in its academic aspirations.
- Engaging with their governments to promote the principles of equitable partnerships and a new approach towards long-term, sustainable research collaboration across Europe and Africa.
- Strengthen the visibility of the CoRE in higher education.

ARUA and The Guild will:

- Work towards persuading policymakers and funders, in the EU and beyond, to support equitable long-term research partnerships, with the support of the CoRE, as well as the member universities.
- Complement university expertise on research funding with advice to the CoREs on strategies towards obtaining research funding that are fitting to their innovative collaboration model.
- Facilitate the governance of the CoRE, at the Steering/institutional level and researchers' level
- Support cross-CoRE engagement as appropriate.
- Raise the visibility of the CoREs, and the universities supporting them, in Africa, Europe and beyond.

4. Referencing CoRE outputs

It is recommended to follow a common referencing system for CoRE initiative. This is intended to be consistent across the initiative while adaptable to the needs of different academic disciplines and the CoRE's own collaborative governance.

The aim is to label and interlink relevant CoRE activities and achievements as comprehensively as possible so that work that was enabled by this collaborative form can be attributed to the collective to build capacity and greater shared reputation for excellence. It allows outputs to be collectively attributed for a wider set of CoRE-related activities than those directly attributable according to the [CRedit taxonomy of output contributor roles](#).

The following suggested texts in italics can be included in peer-reviewed publications or other type of output:

- Footnotes that attribute a publication to CoRE activities:
This [type of output] was [produced in the context of/enabled by collaboration within/ enabled by collaboration with] the [CoRE Short name] Africa-Europe Cluster of Research Excellence, led by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-intensive Universities.
- Author profiles (e.g. on publications, ORCID or institutional webpages) that highlight a CoRE affiliation institutional affiliation to a specific university:

Member of the [CoRE Short name] Africa-Europe Cluster of Research Excellence, led by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) and The Guild of European Research-intensive Universities.

5. Adding new members to a CoRE

General Principles

Each member of a CoRE must nominate appropriate main contacts who are responsible for the institutional and academic commitments to the CoRE. There is no limit to the number of people in a team at each member institution, with support staff and other institutional representatives also encouraged to be involved.

Main contacts at **CoRE Co-Lead institutions** must also take responsibility for co-leading the CoRE as a whole by, for instance, convening meetings, leading internal discussions on governance and speaking publicly on behalf of the CoRE. Co-leading institutions have taken on a significant responsibility providing a greater share of financial and in-kind support the CoREs financially. Nevertheless, all members of a CoRE are encouraged to leadership on certain elements of the action plan if they have the capacity, so that the Co-Leads are supported collectively as well.

CoRE Partners are distinguished by their individual academic and institutional commitment which will normally include significant commitments, e.g. through travel grants, facilities, and research support. CoRE Partners must actively participate in the work of the CoREs, including in research grant applications, and the contribution of their team and resources committed by their institutions must be sufficient to enable their participation. While CoRE Partners will contribute less than CoRE Co-Leads, their contributions must be nonetheless proportionate with the resources dedicated by other CoRE members.

Other Partners are encouraged to bring institutional commitment, but may also participate without institutional commitment of resources. The CoRE membership should decide how much involvement these Other Partners should have in activities and governance to ensure their activities are feasible and fair without institutional resources that most of the CoRE is putting in.

Admission process for potential CoRE members

The **existing CoRE Co-Leads and CoRE Partners are primarily responsible for deciding whether to admit a new member to their CoRE**. They should use their existing internal governance structure, designed by the CoRE membership to fit their needs and their commitment to equitable, long-term collaboration.

In general terms, any potential additional CoRE members should be evaluated according to their capacity, the activities/resources they can contribute to the CoRE. Based on this level of involvement, it should be agreed whether the new member should join as a CoRE Co-Lead, CoRE Partner or Other Partner with a commensurate institutional/ academic commitments to the CoRE's action plan. New members should commit to attend CoRE meetings as appropriate and to abide by the principles of the CoRE initiative and the policy framework set by ARUA and The Guild.

Any new member's involvement at any of these three levels would need to match the commitments as shown by existing members of the CoREs and must demonstrate their commitment through an additional Letter of Support (see section 6 for more details).

Once the existing CoRE consortium and new joiners have come to a preliminary agreement, with all documents in place, the **Co-Leads must notify the Secretary-Generals of ARUA and The Guild**. They must send a copy of the Letter of Support drafted by the new CoRE members with a brief description of the decision to include them in the CoRE.

Inclusion of organisations inside and outside the networks of ARUA and The Guild

CoREs are encouraged to consider whether colleagues based at ARUA/The Guild member institutions can join as CoRE members. If there are colleagues who can contribute to the CoRE plan while maintaining a suitable composition, the CoRE Co-Leads are encouraged to proactively explore such opportunities.

Organisations outside of ARUA and The Guild's networks can also join as CoRE members on equal terms. They would follow the same admission process as ARUA/Guild network members (as described above). Members that are not part of these networks would contribute to the CoRE research agenda but they would not have access to privileged information provided by ARUA and The Guild (unless this were significant for their active contribution to the CoRE).

A key requirement for any new CoRE member, whether a part of the ARUA or Guild networks, would be that the institution commits to supporting the CoRE and their involvement on a long-term basis, in a similar/comparable way to existing CoRE members.

CoREs can maintain or add organisations as 'Other Partners' if it is considered that institutional support is not essential. For example, it could be less essential to have institutional support behind organisations for non-academic institutions whose role involves specific policy work or knowledge valorisation. If such an organisation is considered worthwhile to include by existing CoRE members, it can be added as 'Other Partners' and their letters of support are encouraged but not required. In all cases, the Co-Leads should submit a brief description of the rationale for adding this Other Partner. Organisations can be Other Partners if they are part of ARUA/The Guild networks and not part of these networks.

Proposing new CoREs

The ARUA-Guild Steering Group meeting of 30 September 2024 concluded that no new CoREs will be approved, with the possible exception of CoRE proposals that were in development at that time. Beyond this, new Clusters may be proposed only with prior invitation from the Steering Group, on exceptional strategic grounds. Such proposals will be evaluated according to the same criteria and process as all other established CoREs.

CoREs that are co-led by organisations from outside ARUA/The Guild networks

An organisation based in Africa or Europe that is not a member of neither ARUA nor The Guild can co-lead a CoRE in exceptional circumstances, subject to the agreement of the Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of those networks (or their Boards) for each case

- The non-member institution has to commit to a substantial annual contribution to the CoRE that is equivalent to that made by other Co-Leads in ARUA and The Guild to ensure the sustainability of the CoREs.
- The non-member institution wishing to co-lead pays a 'subscription fee' of 15% of the ordinary membership to ARUA (if it is in Africa) or The Guild (if it is in Europe). This would be a

contribution towards the collective policy work, and the time commitment of the offices in supporting the initiative, which is currently borne by all members of both networks.

- The non-member would commit to participating in governance (steering) and co-leads meetings (as well as meetings of research support offices as appropriate), and to abide by its decisions. In return, they would be entitled to participate fully in these meetings and receive all the paperwork and 'inside' information. Their cluster would receive as much support from The Guild and ARUA offices as any other CoRE.
- The non-member would agree to share any relevant information that may benefit the whole membership collegially and equitably, and it would agree to not sharing confidential information to third parties.
- The Commitment would be on the same terms, and with the same long-term focus, for non-members as for members, but it would be reviewed every three years to ensure the agreement is working for both networks and for the non-member

In return, all CoREs – including those led by non-members of ARUA and The Guild, will be treated equally, including with policy support and the generation of funding initiatives.

6. Letters of support required of CoRE members

The Letter of Support template can be used and adapted to detail how each CoRE member institution intends to be active in the CoRE over a 10-year period and what aspects of that activity will be funding by institutional resources.

A copy of each Letter of Support must be submitted to ARUA and The Guild in PDF format.

Any changes or updates in the commitments made by a CoRE members must be notified to ARUA and The Guild with a copy of the up-to-date Letter of Support.

Template for a CoRE Letter of Support

** Only these features are mandatory, all other content is flexible and to be agreed with other CoRE member, the template below provides a non-exhaustive list of suggestions of the types of resources an institution can commit.*

Recommended features:	What these features can include:
Official headed letter*	Use institutional approval process and official letterhead (logo, institutional address etc.) for the letter of commitment.
Signatures*	Signatures of the (Vice-)President/(Deputy) Vice-Chancellor and/or the Dean (when resources are at faculty level)
Key information about the CoRE member institution and their contacts*	Institutions are encouraged to include a few sentences on the • Full name, email address and job title of the academics at the institution who are working on the CoRE. • Full name, email address and job title of the institutional contact for that CoRE
Text on your institutional match to the CoRE	• Brief description of the institutional strengths which are well suited to the work of the CoRE and • how the CoRE helps the institution and/or research group achieve its strategic goals

Text on financial support	<i>"To support the CoRE's success in the long-term, [Institution] commits to provide..."</i>
Text on administrative support	<i>"To support the CoRE's success in the long-term, [Institution] commits to provide..."</i>
Text on technical support	<i>"To support the CoRE's success in the long-term, [Institution] commits to provide..."</i>
Text on dedicating existing resources, funding or infrastructure to the CoRE	<i>"To support the CoRE's success in the long-term, [Institution] commits to provide/allocate..."</i>

7. Annual Report

The Annual Report is the main mechanism for monitoring CoRE activities, achievements and implementation. It is submitted to ARUA and The Guild Secretariats each year via an online questionnaire.

The responses to these questions will inform the ARUA/Guild university leaderships, including the Africa-Europe CoRE Steering Group. It will provide data for each CoRE member university, including on how it can best further support the work of the CoRE(s) it is involved with.

Annual Report questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed as an online form for ease of use with response required from each CoRE on a yearly basis. Multiple responses may be submitted for each CoRE, the data from these responses is collated into an overall report for each CoRE.

The questionnaire focuses mainly on activities and achievements that arose from CoRE activities in the previous 12 months.

Responses are not expected for every section, if there are sections which are not applicable or which did not have any activity in the previous 12 months, they can be left blank.

Apart from dividing questions into sections, the questionnaire also divides its data collection according to the type of person involved in the CoRE who is responding. This can enable richer, stratified data that can be used to support efforts towards equity. Trends, practices and lessons identified through reporting can be linked to specific roles/career levels, specific institutions/continents and thus they can be acted upon more effectively.

Respondents can choose to identify their role according to three categories: CoRE Co-Lead academics, CoRE Partner academics and institutional contact points (this third category can include CoRE coordinators, project managers, research managers and administrators).

8. Action Plan

The Action Plan is a living document that each CoRE should have drafted to help organise the collaboration and provide an overview of the aims and objective. It is primarily a document for use within the CoRE and is not expected to be reported. ARUA and The Guild ask that a copy of the Action Plan in use is circulated with their offices to add to their understanding of upcoming activities so that the offices can advocate on their behalf more effectively.

Designing an action plan is not intended to standardise ways of working between different CoREs. It should be designed for the needs of each CoRE, using a flexible model form that is intended to support the CoRE membership to think ahead, link different aspects of their work and coordinate the activities of all members over the short, medium and long term.

It primarily serves the CoRE members to agree a plan among themselves and carry out their collective activities and objectives. Furthermore, the document allocates resources and activities to different members of the CoRE.

Objectives/mission/vision

This section includes a concise description of what the CoRE set out to achieve after 10 years. This should be based on key extracts from CoRE proposal abstracts with some refining from discussions of the CoRE members. Over time it should become a relatively stable but can be adjustable according to changes to come up for the CoRE.

Resources

This section lists the existing resources within the CoRE that could be used to achieve the overall objectives. It would be elaborate on the CoRE's abstract document by listing the team members and capacity at each CoRE members institution in more detail.

Processes

A brief overview of the CoRE's agreed internal ways of communicating, conferring and working together that helps it to operate effectively and equitably. As these processes should underpin activities, their relevance to specific activities should be indicated.

Activities

This section lists the planned research, education or capacity building activities of the CoRE in brief terms. Whereas it should not provide in-depth descriptions of any of the activities, enough information should be included to make the activity identifiable with a clear allocation of the activity to a specific CoRE member.

Many of these activities depend on securing funding but they should be listed anyway so that the ambition and potential of the CoRE can be considered and discussed by all CoRE members. It also serves as a reference text that can be reused for proposal drafting, and vice versa the action plan can be enriched with activities developed for proposals.

Outcomes

This section lists planned outcomes or types of outcomes from CoRE activities over the short, medium and long term. These outcomes should be linked as best as possible to one or more specific activities from the previous section and CoRE member to whom the activity is allocated.

Impact

This section is expected to list pathways from the outcomes of CoRE activities to impact in society, preferably organised according to the priority areas of public health, green transition, innovation and technology, and capacities for sciences.

9. Communications

Website

[The Guild](#) hosts dedicated webpages on its website to promote the CoREs. Next to the main landing page which contains an overview of all the CoREs, the subpages contain detailed information about each individual CoRE.

The secretariats ask the CoREs to please:

- Send both ARUA and The Guild secretariats a link to the website/webpage of your CoRE (if available).
- If a CoRE website/webpage is created, a link must be added to direct visitors to The Guild's CoRE webpage which corresponds with your CoRE.

Maintaining up-to-date websites

Co-Leads of CoREs are encouraged to always contact representatives from both secretariats to share their updates and information.

- The Guild contact points: Sean Rowlands (sean.rowlands@the-guild.eu) and Janne Rooms (janne.rooms@the-guild.eu).
- ARUA contact points: Emmanuel Abbey (enabbey@arua.org) and Emmanuel Adu-Danso (eadudanso@arua.org).

What type of update should we receive

The following information should be sent:

- Changes in the members and internal structure of the CoRE: contact points, co-leads, member universities, etc.
- Activities from the CoREs: related publications, videos, staff profiles or interviews events, awards, etc.
- Updates on applications to funding schemes (brief info about submitted applications or applications under development, including a reference for the funding call, what CoRE activity it supports and which CoRE member are involved)

Social media

CoREs which have the means can create their own social media profiles that would be led by the co-leading institutions.

A common hashtag (**#AfricaEuropeCoRE**) has been created to enhance the visibility of the initiative, and to easily share (and see) information related to the CoREs. This hashtag must be used in communication activities.

The secretariats have created joint social media accounts on X and LinkedIn dedicated to this initiative to disseminate updates from the CoREs. These are jointly managed by ARUA and The Guild.

We encourage to:

- Tag the CoRE social media accounts [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and the two secretariats ARUA ([X](#) and [LinkedIn](#)) and The Guild ([X](#) and [LinkedIn](#))
- Use the hashtag **#AfricaEuropeCoRE**

Referencing and acknowledgements

It is important to reference the initiative and the individual CoRE properly in their branding, dissemination and research output: *Africa-Europe Clusters of Research Excellence, led by ARUA and The Guild*.

Logos

To ensure that there is common visibility/recognition of the initiative, ARUA and The Guild have created a joint logo to be used in all CoRE communication materials to interlink the work done across the CoRE initiative.

Individual CoREs can create, use and keep their own individual logos if they choose to, these can be combined with the initiative joint logo.