

The Advancing Leadership Program

The world today is marked by volatility and uncertainty, with global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion becoming increasingly interconnected and transboundary. Addressing these issues requires bold, coordinated, and transdisciplinary (TD) approaches that bridge sectors, knowledge systems, and regions.

Multidisciplinary research brings together experts from multiple disciplines to address a common problem, leveraging their combined expertise for better solutions. Interdisciplinary research goes a step further by integrating knowledge across disciplines to create a unified approach. Transdisciplinary research, as defined in the 2020 OECD report *Addressing Societal Challenges Using Transdisciplinary Research*,¹ extends beyond academia by involving non-academic participants—such as practitioners, indigenous and local communities, resource managers, and government officials—in the co-creation of knowledge and research goals. This collaborative approach fosters a holistic understanding of complex issues and enables the development of innovative, real-world solutions.

TD teams explore complex challenges through innovative approaches that integrate diverse perspectives, uncovering new insights into sustainability. However, TD work remains challenging due to the need for knowledge integration across disciplines, sectors, and cultures. It requires navigating tensions and synergies, bridging silos, and fostering collaboration beyond traditional boundaries.²

Traditional academic and professional training often fails to prepare individuals for these complexities.^{3 4 5} Specialized training in trust-building, power dynamics, and cross-cultural communication is essential. Building on the Belmont Forum's 14 years of experience in the TD landscape, the Advancing Leadership Program (ALP) seeks to unify, complement, and enhance existing resources to cultivate a global network of boundary-spanning change-makers. ALP aims to foster equitable North-South partnerships and accommodate under-represented knowledge while equipping leaders with the skills to drive systemic change.

¹ OECD (2020), "Addressing societal challenges using transdisciplinary research", OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers, No. 88, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0ca0ca45-en>.

² Harris F, Lyon F, Sioen GB, Ebi KL (2024). Working with the tensions of transdisciplinary research: a review and agenda for the future of knowledge coproduction in the Anthropocene. *Global Sustainability* 7, e13, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.11>

³ McGregor, S.L.T. and Volckmann, R. (2011) Feature Article: Transdisciplinarity in Higher Education, Part 7: Conclusion, *Integral Leadership Review*. Available at: <https://integralleadershipreview.com/2630-transdisciplinarity-in-higher-education-part-7/> (Accessed: 01 April 2025).

⁴ M J Barrett, Khrisha B Alphonsus, Matt Harmin, Tasha Epp, Carolyn Hoessler, Danielle McIntyre, Bruce Reeder, Baljit Singh. (2019) Learning for Transdisciplinary Leadership: Why Skilled Scholars Coming Together Is Not Enough, *BioScience*, Volume 69, Issue 9, September 2019, Pages 736–745,

⁵ Horn, A., Visser, M.W., Pittens, C.A.C.M. et al. (2024) Transdisciplinary learning trajectories: developing action and attitude in interplay. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 11, 149. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02541-w>

Goal/Aim

The aim of the ALP is to cultivate TD leaders from various domains (policy, academia, civil society, business, local communities etc.) to develop and refine the skills, tools, competencies and mind-set that allow them to navigate uncertainty, manage diverse multi-actor teams, and work effectively across boundaries. The Belmont Forum's ALP facilitates this enabling environment to produce TD leaders equipped to ethically and collaboratively tackle the world's most pressing problems and drive sustainable solutions.

Vision

The ALP aims to transform how global challenges are tackled—moving beyond traditional collaboration methods towards dynamic, transdisciplinary partnerships that co-create equitable, real-world solutions. Rooted in inclusion, hands-on learning, and practical application, the ALP fosters a bold community driven by courage, resilience, and curiosity. Equipped with the ALP heart, mind and skill-set, these leaders are breaking new ground on systemic issues while empowering others to do the same. As momentum grows, more people and partners will join the community, and the ALP continues to seize every opportunity to drive meaningful change—without compromise.

The ALP Mind-set

This mind-set is about embracing complexity, valuing diverse perspectives, and actively working toward inclusive, co-created solutions that address global challenges. At its core, the ALP mind-set is for those who refuse to accept the status quo—the boundary-spanners, the change-makers—who are driven by a deep commitment to transforming both systems and themselves. Equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, tools and agency, this mindset leads with intention, ensuring that engagement with societal actors is authentic, impactful, and sustainable. Through a process of self-discovery and collaboration, ALP cultivates leaders who are ready to disrupt silos, amplify unheard voices, and co-create a more just and resilient world.

Core Anchors for the ALP

- **Bridging Knowledge Systems:** The program emphasizes the integration of diverse knowledge systems, including those of local communities, into research processes. This ensures that solutions are not just theoretically sound but also culturally and contextually relevant.
- **Empowering Underrepresented Voices:** By training leaders from diverse sectors, including local communities, the program supports equity in decision-making and ensures that historically marginalized voices have a seat at the table in shaping sustainability initiatives.
- **Empowering Boundary-Spanning Change-makers:** The program focuses on championing those that are actively connecting disciplines, cultures, and sectors; demonstrating a commitment to co-creation of solutions, promoting fairness and sharing the ownership of addressing sustainability challenges.
- **Capacity Building for Practical Outcomes:** The ALP's curriculum will be designed to equip participants with practical skills to handle the real-world complexities of TD research. This translates into more impactful, equitable, and sustainable outcomes that are grounded in collaboration.

Objectives

- To enhance the TD leadership skills, tools and mind-set needed to lead and collaboratively work as a multi-actor team.

- To build a global community that advances transdisciplinary knowledge, connects diverse stakeholders, and fosters collaboration, learning, and innovation to address sustainability challenges.
- To develop practical learning experiences within the community of Belmont Forum and its partners.
- To cultivate equitable partnerships that will amplify current training opportunities provided by various organizations to provide a suite of skills.

Developing the Advancing Leadership Program Scopings (2021-2023)

Initially, the Belmont Forum conducted scoping activities in 2021 and 2023, engaging in discussions with like-minded institutions pursuing similar goals to identify gaps and potential partnerships across the TD research landscape. These virtual scoping sessions and institutional dialogues revealed a clear and consistent demand for training and workshops focused on transdisciplinary research, networking, fundraising, science-policy engagement, and science communication. The insights gathered highlight areas where the Belmont Forum is uniquely positioned to add significant value.

‘World Tour’ Workshops (2024-2025)

As a global leadership program, the ALP required the engagement of diverse perspectives active in the TD space. Referred to as a ‘World Tour’, workshops were held to stimulate this global co-creation process. These were broadly intended to explore the needs of TD researchers and practitioners and begin a process of co-creating a comprehensive TD leadership program that can not only advance TD research but most importantly build a coalition of boundary-spanning change-makers who work together to address society’s most pressing problems.

These sessions explored the needs of TD researchers and practitioners tackling society's most urgent challenges. The process began with the SPARK Workshop at the SRI 2024 Congress in [Helsinki, Finland](#), engaging researchers, policymakers, and diplomats. Insights from this session guided workshops in [Ayutthaya, Thailand](#), which focused on science policy, and [Pretoria, South Africa](#), involving the Africa Science Leadership Programme (ASLP) fellows. Across all three workshops, there were a diverse mix of early to mid-career professionals including researchers, practitioners, policy makers, diplomats and thought leaders, fostering rich exchanges of ideas across disciplines, cultures and sectors.



Facilitated by [Inclusive Innovation](#), workshop participants shared personal experiences and regional perspectives, using scenario planning to envision future challenges and identify essential skills for authentic collaboration. Activities were designed to uncover the current TD research landscape, its challenges, and the skill sets needed to navigate complex and emerging issues. Echoing the outcomes of the scoping activities, participants highlighted the need for support in key areas such as communication, networking, facilitation, strategic 'soft' skills, adaptability, foresight, and the ability to bridge science, policy, and community engagement. The workshops provided an opportunity for participants to offer feedback that would best inform the emerging curriculum for the ALP, contributing to its iterative development.





Photo Credit: Inclusive Innovation

Open to professionals at all career stages from both the Global South and North, the Belmont Forum's ALP will enhance competencies in TD sustainability research, leadership, collaboration, and communication, enabling participants to engage confidently in the global TD research landscape. This inclusive, dynamic approach positions the ALP as a transformative force for fostering collaboration and advancing solutions to global challenges.