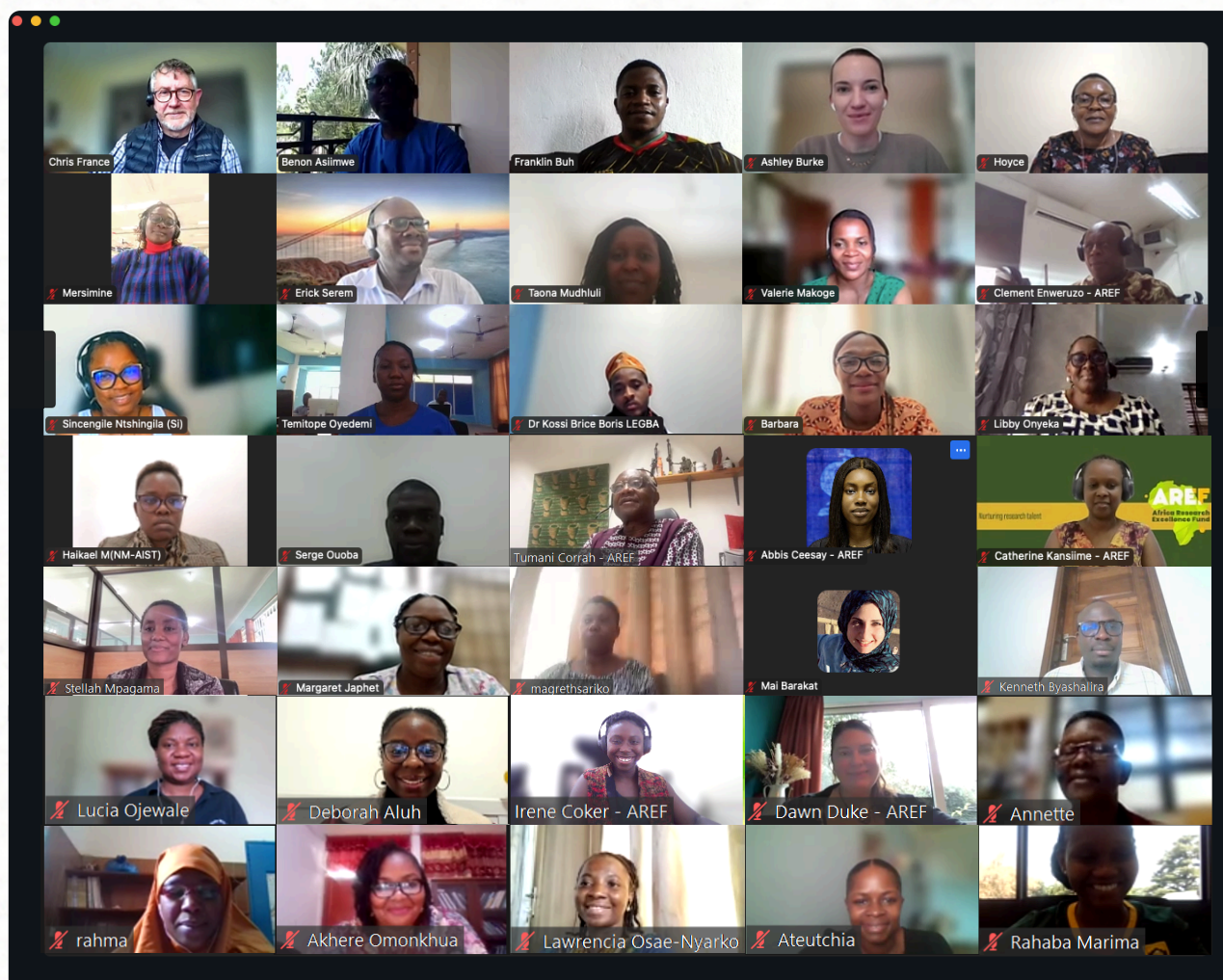




# AREF's Grant Writing Programme Report

AREF 10th Anniversary Impact Evaluation, May 2025



Prepared by:

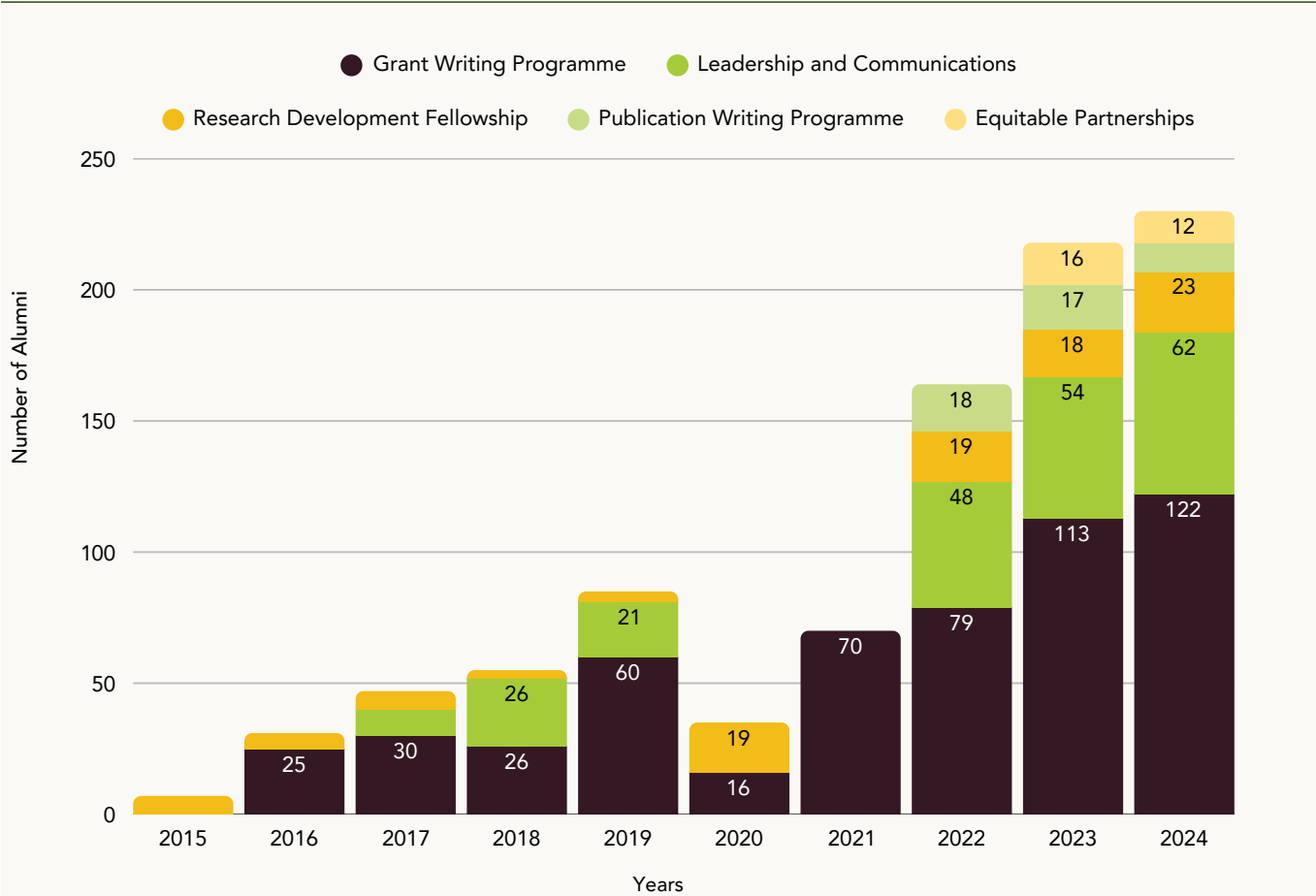
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# About the Programme

The Grant Writing Programme (GWP) is AREF’s most popular programme, providing Early Career Researchers (ECRs) with the essential skills, networks, and mentorship needed to secure competitive research funding. The programme is led by world-class experts with extensive experience in grant writing, review panels, and research leadership. The programme equips participants with practical skills, strategic insights, and mentorship, while also fostering networking and collaboration to support long-term career growth. Its goal is to empower ECRs to secure research grants, fellowships, and awards, strengthening their contributions to scientific progress.

Since its launch in 2016, AREF’s Essential Grant Writing Skills Programme (now known simply as the Grant Writing Programme) has grown significantly, becoming AREF’s largest initiative. Recognising its success, AREF introduced several other GWPs, including the open call Francophone Grant Writing Programme - a French-language version for French speakers, and the Women in Research Grant Writing Programme. AREF also delivers Bespoke programmes for partner organisations, such as the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) Grant Writing Programme and the One Health (GIZ) Grant Writing Programme. To date, AREF’s GWPs have trained 541 researchers, representing 57.61% of all AREF alumni.

Participation across AREF programmes (2015 - 2024)

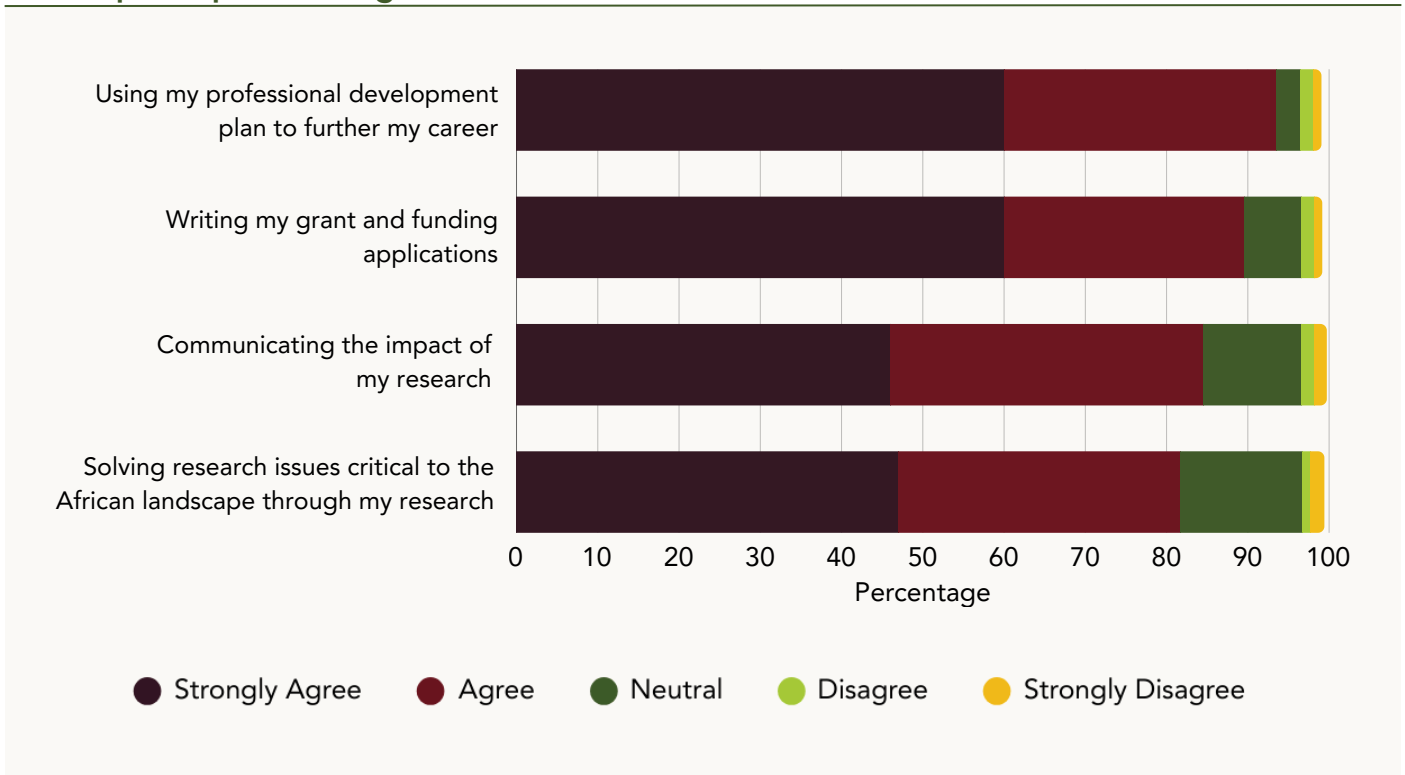


# Impact

All estimates in the impact section below were derived from an impact survey which was responded to by 208 GWP Alumni.

The AREF GWP has contributed profoundly to the research impact of its participants, with 82.9% affirming that “the GWP has helped them solve research issues of importance to Africa”. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the skills gained through the GWP were valuable across the following areas:

## GWP participants rating of skills usefulness

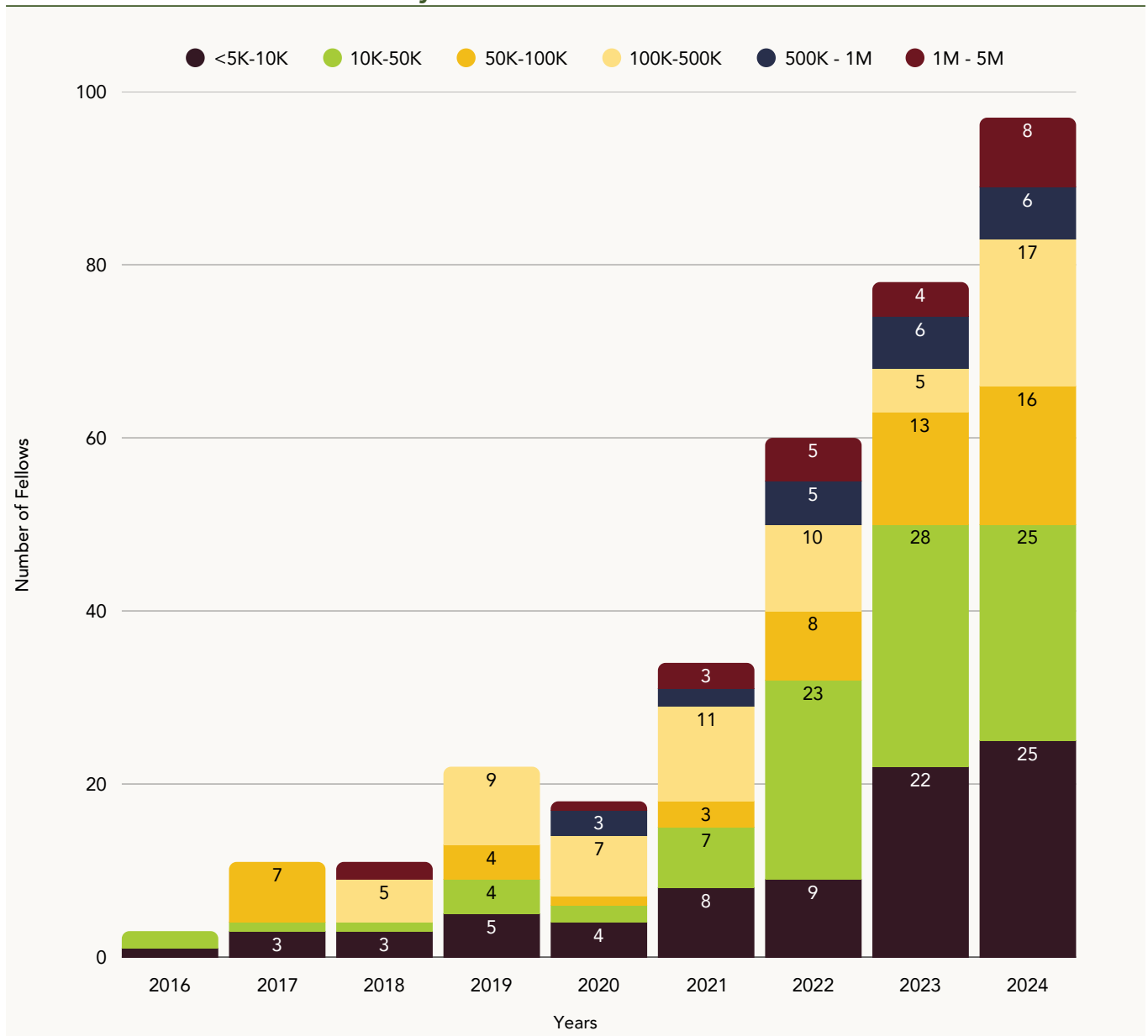


- **96.2%** agreed that they are using their professional development plan to further their careers, suggesting that professional development plans are widely viewed as beneficial for career advancement.
- **91.3%** agreed that the programme has positively influenced their **ability to write grant and funding applications**, further emphasising the effectiveness of these programmes in supporting participants’ grant writing skills.
- **86.6%** agreed that the programme was helpful in improving their **ability to communicate the impact of their research**.

The GWP has been a catalyst for career advancement among African researchers. The GWP demonstrated the strongest association with career progression over three years, with 60% (n= 33) of participants who experienced upward career movement having completed the GWP. Additionally, 67.61% (n=48) of alumni who experienced upwards career progression in five years - moving from early to mid, or mid to senior – had participated in the GWP.

The GWP has also increased participants’ ability to secure funding. Following their GWP participation, 67.2% (n=135) of survey respondents submitted a grant application, with 45.3% (n=91) securing at least one successful grant. Participants secured an average of 2.7 grants per person (Median 2) with the total funding amount exceeding £115 million in total, and a median grant value of £38,718. Even among those with no prior grant success, 55 alumni secured their first grant after completing the programme, underscoring its role in bridging funding gaps for ECRs.

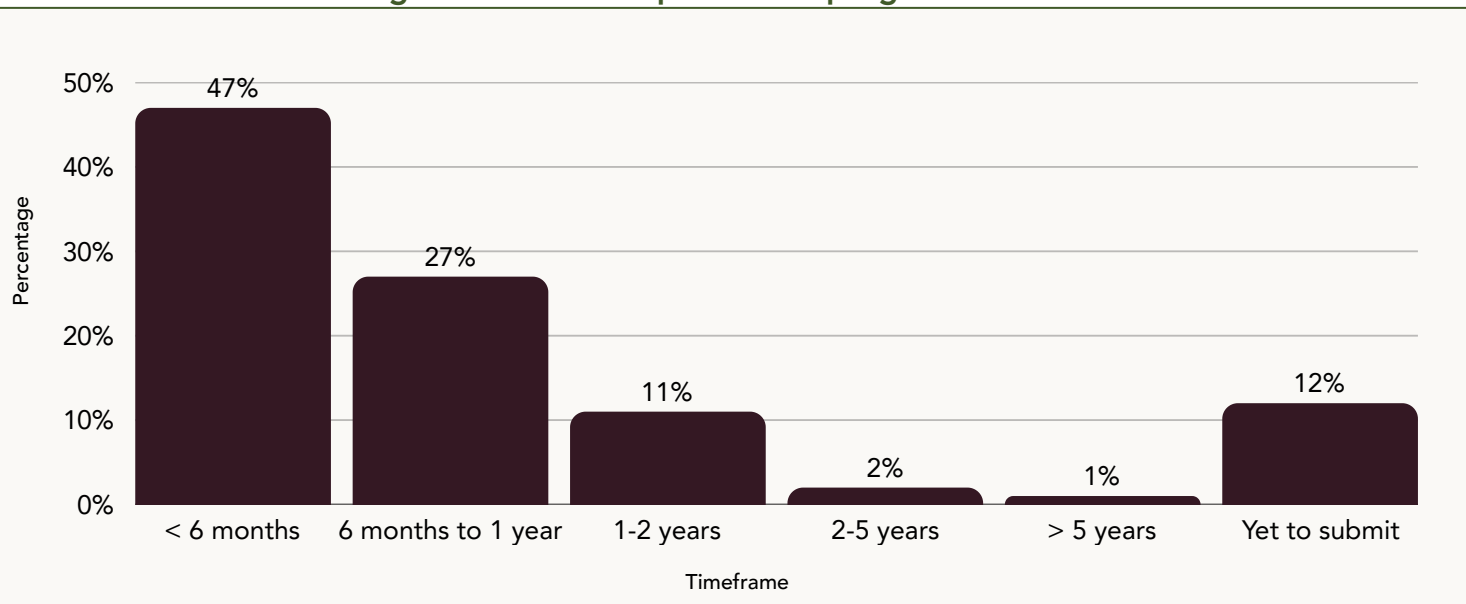
### Grant awarded to GWP alumni by value and over time





Grant applications were submitted according to different time frames, with 46.2% submitting within six months post-programme, 28.4% within six months to one year, 13.6% within one to two years and 2.4% after two years. About 9.5% had yet to submit a grant, citing various reasons, including being too busy with academic responsibilities, administrative and teaching duties, or not feeling ready to apply. Others faced personal, family, or health challenges, or were still searching for the right opportunity, mentor or collaborators. Some also felt that the grant process was too competitive, which discouraged them from investing time in developing an application.

### Timeframe to first grant submission post AREF programme





## Case Study: Dr. Modibo Sangare

### Advancing Research Careers through AREF's Grant Writing Programme

Dr. Modibo Sangare, an Associate Professor at the University of Sales, Mali, enrolled in the AREF Grant Writing Programme (GWP) in 2019 following a recommendation from the West African Centre for Cell Biology of Infectious Pathogens in Ghana, where he had completed his postdoctoral research.

Prior to attending, he aimed to enhance his skills in formulating research questions, developing proposals, and budgeting. He believed that the training would improve his competitiveness in securing research funding. The programme exceeded his expectations, equipping him with the skills to be highly competitive in grant applications.

A key takeaway was learning to build collaborations, an area where he had previously struggled. As he transitioned from neurogenetics to autism research, he lacked mentorship at his home institution. The programme's focus on personal development and collaboration strategies helped him establish crucial professional networks and mentorship connections.

### Opportunities Beyond the Programme

AREF invited Dr. Sangare to co-facilitate future training sessions, a pivotal opportunity that boosted his confidence. Despite institutional barriers to securing his own grants, he became an active mentor, guiding researchers across Africa in obtaining fellowships.

Dr. Sangare found AREF's hands-on, practical approach to be distinct from other workshops. The structured content, which covered the entire research development framework and the development of a concept note, was particularly valuable. The faculty's deep understanding of funding schemes for African researchers also provided tailored guidance.

Since completing the programme, Dr. Sangare has continued to co-facilitate GWP sessions. Looking to the future, he emphasizes that participant motivation is crucial for success and suggests providing pre-training materials in advance.

### Conclusion

The GWP has been pivotal in supporting the careers of researchers in Africa. Dr. Sangare's journey exemplifies the transformative impact of targeted research training and highlights the need for continued support for early career researchers.