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Advancing Legislative Aides' Effectiveness through Professional Development: Lessons from Research Enterprise Systems.

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About Research Enterprise Systems (RES)

Research Enterprise Systems (RES) is a pan-African, independent, and non-partisan knowledge production, capacity development, communication, and outreach organization. Founded in 2015, RES offers innovative services in knowledge production as well as capacity development to improve decision-making in public, private and civic sectors. It collaborates with local and global organizations, governments and institutions to drive evidence-based solutions, fostering innovation and sustainable development through shared expertise and resources while empowering the supply and demand sides of the evidence value chain for sustainable social, political and economic development. For more, see www.researchenterprisesystems.org

Acknowledgement and Methods Note

This learning piece benefitted from insights, feedback and contributions of our colleagues at Research Enterprise Systems as well as other reviewers. This paper is based entirely on desk research. No original fieldwork or interviews were conducted. All information are attributed to their sources, and any errors remain responsibility of the authors.

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Background

At the core of every democracy lies the legislature, the institution that translates collective aspirations into binding public policy. It is the only arm of government composed entirely of elected representatives, vested with the constitutional responsibility to legislate, oversee the executive and represent citizens. The legislature thus stands as both the soul of governance and the bridge between state power and public accountability. When the legislature falters, the entire system of governance becomes vulnerable and the consequences can be far-reaching. Around the world, many countries are witnessing a steady decline in the effectiveness of their legislatures. But what makes a strong legislature? Is it the number of laws passed, the prestige of its members, or the effectiveness of its oversight?

Legislative strength is not defined merely by the number of bills passed or the prominence of its members. Rather, it depends on the invisible machinery that enables lawmakers to perform effectively: a skilled, motivated, and knowledgeable support system. Legislative aides—the unsung heroes behind every lawmaker—form the backbone of this system. Their contributions, though often overlooked, are central to sustaining a legislature that is both responsive and informed. Through research, policy analysis, drafting and oversight support, they ensure that decision-making remains evidence-based and aligned with national priorities.



Fig 1. Clerk to the National Assembly, Management Staff and other dignitaries at the opening ceremony

In the Nigerian context, their role becomes even more crucial because legislators' turnover remains strikingly high after each election cycle. For instance, after the 2023 general elections, the composition of the National Assembly skewed largely in favour of first timers. The 10th Senate had 46% of its members as first timers, while in the House of Representatives, 30% of its members were first timers. Although, new lawmakers often bring fresh energy and vision, they frequently lack the procedural knowledge and historical context required for effective lawmaking. This attrition poses

significant challenges to institutional memory, policy continuity and legislative effectiveness. Competent legislative aides, therefore, serve as the institutional memory of the legislature bridging the gap between transition and continuity.

However, the capacity of these aides to perform optimally is often constrained by systemic challenges. Persistent capacity gaps exist in policy research, legislative drafting, communication and leadership, among others. Compounding these are cultural and institutional barriers, limited recognition of training as a professional necessity, inadequate resources and infrastructure for learning, weak incentives linked to career progression and the misconception that training programs serve as mere avenues for allowances or respite. These factors collectively constrain the culture of continuous professional development within the legislative system. It was against this background that in 2024 and 2025 the National Assembly contracted Research Enterprise Systems (RES) to design and deliver Capacity-Building Training Programme for Legislative Aides.

Unlike conventional workshops that often prioritize attendance over impact, RES approached the exercise as a strategic intervention, redefining capacity building as a process of learning, reflection, and service. The training emphasized not only technical competence but also the cultivation of soft skills essential for effective legislative support—communication, teamwork, leadership and ethical professionalism.

The aim of this learning piece is to share RES' experiences in delivering the training to over 6,000 legislative aides within the two years, detailing the approach adopted, outcomes achieved and lessons learned. It offers evidence-based reflections and practical recommendations for institutionalizing a culture of continuous learning within the legislature.

RES' Approach to Delivering Capacity Building for Legislative Aides

The training of the Legislative Aides was an adaptive learning process that positioned aides not as passive trainees but as strategic actors whose competence directly shapes how effectively the National Assembly functions within Nigeria's democracy. The programme treated capacity building as an institutional intervention, not a workshop.

Unlike typical training service providers that sometimes utilize fixed generic contents irrespective of the unique characteristic of the learners, RES avoided the idea of a one-size-fits-all approach by adopting customized curriculum contents and delivery pedagogy. A layered model that combined technical skills such as legislative drafting, budget analysis and evidence synthesis with soft skills that include emotional intelligence and conflict management were integral part of the learning design. This dual approach ensured that aides were not only technically equipped but also institutionally aware, capable of managing relationships and responding to the demands of a politically dynamic and sensitive environment. Each approach built on the other, forming a coherent system that linked design, delivery, facilitation and learning culture into one adaptive process.

1. Adaptive Design and Continuous Learning

The approach to training was built as a continuous learning loop, not a static set of lectures. Each component, including curriculum design, facilitation, engagement and review, fed directly into the next. The model reversed the traditional logic of public-sector training, which often treats learning as a one-way transfer of information. Learning was structured around feedback and reflection. At the end of each day, participants shared insights while facilitators and coordinators debriefed and analyzed patterns. The coordination team reviewed these insights daily and adjusted the next day's sessions to reflect what worked and what needed refinement. Accordingly, when the periodic review revealed that secretaries and personal assistants struggled with the technical depth of the "Budget Process and Oversight" and "Civil Society Relations with the National Assembly" sessions, the module was restructured. The revised version introduced "Managing Your Boss" and "ICT." As a result, it was observed that the rate of participants' engagement improved immediately and comprehension deepened. This real-time responsiveness turned what could have been a rigid training agenda into a living classroom.

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“We realized we needed to tweak and adjust some of the content to suit the peculiar needs of the secretaries and personal assistants and that flexibility made all the difference.”

— RES Team Member

”

2. Multi-layered Need-based Curriculum

A multi-layered learning framework was developed that reflected the institutional hierarchy within the National Assembly. Participants were grouped by cadre: special advisers, legislative aides and secretarial staff, so that content aligned with the operational realities of each group. On one hand, special advisers and legislative aides engaged in complex, scenario-based exercises that cut across General Principles of Legislative Drafting, Bill Scrutiny and Development of Lead Debate, Law Making Process in the National Assembly, Budget Process and Oversight in the National Assembly, etc. On the other hand, secretaries and personal assistants focused on complementary skill sets that covered ICT and Managing Your Boss. This differentiation allowed each group to grow within its context and ensured that learning outcomes matched real institutional needs.

The curriculum was grounded in context. Modules covered key legislative functions, including roles of aides, lawmaking, bill scrutiny, budget analysis and committee oversight, alongside professional skills such as public relations, image management and compliance with the Code of Conduct. Soft skills like emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and feedback culture were integrated to strengthen institutional behavior and leadership.



Fig 2. Cross-section of participants at one of the sessions.

3. Participatory and Experiential Pedagogy

The pedagogy broke from the conventional “talk-and-chalk” style. Facilitators were chosen for their ability to teach through participation, co-creation and contextual understanding rather than through rote instruction. Sessions featured role-plays, small-group analysis and scenario-based simulations that mirrored the complexities of legislative work.

This approach aligned with adult learning principles because people retain knowledge best when they test it within their real institutional environment. The interactive design also fostered peer learning and encouraged participants to link abstract concepts to everyday realities. One of the standout features was the set of sessions led by the Executive Director of RES on conflict resolution and emotional intelligence. These sessions were consistently rated as most impactful because they offered concrete strategies for navigating interpersonal and institutional dynamics. By blending practical examples with reflection, facilitators helped participants move beyond knowledge acquisition to behavioral change.

“

“I actually came with a lower expectation but this training has surprised me with the quality and delivery of resource persons.”

— A Senior Legislative Aide

”

4. Coordination and Team Synergy



Fig 3. L-R - Deputy Clerk to the National Assembly, Clerk to the National Assembly and Commissioner, National Assembly Service Commission

Behind the seamless delivery was strong internal coordination. The consulting organization team operated with a shared understanding of purpose, clear roles and mutual accountability. Tasks flowed easily, from managing facilitators' needs and responding to participant concerns to adapting schedules in real time, because the team functioned as a cohesive unit. This synergy reflected institutional culture of excellence, integrity and trust.

The daily reflection meetings among RES' staff and Knowledge Mobilization Volunteers (KMs) allowed the team to review logistics, adjust pacing and refine facilitation strategies. These

internal debriefs transformed operational routines into learning opportunities, embedding continuous improvement into the organization's DNA.

5. Learning Environment and Professionalism

RES treated logistics as part of the pedagogy. The venue was selected strategically to host nearly 600 participants while enabling both plenary and breakout sessions. Multiple halls allowed segmentation by cadre, reducing overcrowding and ensuring that facilitators could engage participants meaningfully. Session timing, communication flow and coordination were managed with professionalism. The aesthetics of the venue and the efficiency of the setup created a sense of order and seriousness that reinforced institutional respect. Professionalism in delivery signaled to participants that their time and learning mattered, reinforcing a culture of respect that deepened engagement.

“*The organizers of the training did really great.*”
— A Senior Legislative Aide

6. Knowledge Mobilisation Volunteers (KMs)

The Knowledge Mobilization Volunteers were central to the training's smooth execution. This group of young graduates provided logistical and communication support that kept the sessions organized and responsive. They handled registration, coordinated sessions, managed materials and ensured efficient movement of participants.



Fig 4. RES Team and Knowledge Mobilization Volunteers (KMs)

Their courteous presence and quick adaptability created a professional and welcoming learning atmosphere. Participants and facilitators repeatedly noted their contribution. The KMs' energy and discipline turned logistical coordination into a learning enabler, proof that support systems, when well-managed, amplify the quality of any training programme.

7. Stakeholder Rapport and Institutional Trust

Effective and timely communication was maintained with the National Assembly management from the planning phase to delivery. This collaboration ensured participant mobilization, smooth venue access and logistical coherence. Within the sessions, participants were treated as collaborators rather than passive recipients, which encouraged honest conversation about institutional realities. This mutual respect built trust and enriched discussions, deepening the relevance of each session. Stakeholders' visible support also reinforced the program's credibility and institutional alignment.

“

“In view of the scarce resources, I must appreciate the National Assembly Management for putting this training together and the RES for doing justice to the training!”

— A Senior Legislative Aide

”

8. Communication and Real-Time Documentation

The communication team played an active role throughout the training. They documented daily activities through interviews, photographs and videos, capturing authentic reflections and success stories in real time. These materials now serve multiple purposes, including visibility, reporting and learning retention. More importantly, they preserve participant voices as primary evidence of the program's impact, strengthening credibility and transparency.

9. Institutional Learning and Model Consolidation

The training was as much a learning exercise for RES as it was for the participants. Through daily reviews and a structured post-training reflection, the team captured insights on facilitation, coordination and pedagogy. This iterative mindset now defines RES' institutional approach. Each training functions as both an intervention and an experiment, ensuring that the organization learns, adapts and evolves with each engagement. Ultimately, the National Assembly aides' training proved that institutional development cannot be achieved through standardized instruction. It demands context sensitivity, flexibility and shared

“

“We do not just train; we learn from our own training.”

— Executive Director, RES

”

accountability for outcomes. By treating learning as both a method and a value, the consulting organization modeled the kind of adaptive leadership essential for institutional strengthening. This experience now serves as a replicable blueprint for designing public-sector learning programs that build competence and strengthen systems from within.

Effective Delivery of Capacity Building for Legislative Aides: What Worked and How?

Building on the adaptive, participant-centered approach, the programme translated design intentions into practical outcomes, fostering curiosity, peer exchange and the direct application of learning to day-to-day responsibilities. Several factors contributed to the training's success:

- **Relevant and Practical Curriculum:** Modules reflected real-life legislative work and experiences, enabling participants to connect lessons to daily responsibilities and be open to applying new knowledge immediately.
- **Participatory Facilitation:** Interactive sessions, relatable examples and scenario-based exercises simplified complex topics and boosted participants' comprehension.
- **Strong Team Coordination:** Effective collaboration among RES staff, facilitators and K MVs ensured seamless delivery of tasks, quick problem-solving which shows professionalism.
- **Choice of Venue:** Given the large number of participants, the use of multiple halls for manageable cohorts reduced crowding and enhanced focus, allowing for smaller, more engaging group interactions.
- **K MV Efficiency and Support:** Knowledge Mobilization Volunteers trained over an extended period of time provided responsive logistical support, creating a well-organized and participant-friendly environment.
- **Productive Stakeholder Relationships:** RES' relationship with the National Assembly backed with frequent consultation fostered trust, facilitated smooth operations and encouraged active participant engagement.
- **Continuous Adaptation through Feedback:** Daily debrief sessions by the RES team enabled rapid adjustments to emerging situations aimed at achieving participant-centered training.

"It is very effective and efficient as it broadened my horizons with regards to my role as a legislative Aide."
— Training Participant

What Needs Improvement?

Despite the successes of the training, a few areas emerged that required refinement. These challenges provided valuable insights for strengthening future capacity-building programs:

• Uneven Delivery Approach

In large training programs, variation in facilitation style is expected. However, when the gap in pedagogy and delivery methods becomes too wide, it can affect learning quality. In this particular case, some sessions benefited from highly interactive and participatory methods, while others leaned heavily on lecture-style delivery. This created noticeable asymmetry in participants' learning experiences.

This experience highlighted the importance of pre-delivery harmonization. Micro-labs or preparatory synchronization meetings, where facilitators collectively review objectives, agree on delivery rhythm and practice interactive techniques, are essential to ensure a consistent and engaging experience for all participants.

• Variation in Participants' Engagement

While most participants were actively involved throughout the training, there were instances of significant variation in the levels of engagement. Factors such as topic complexity, session timing, group dynamics and the participant group size sometimes led to disparity in participation, with some aides contributing more actively than others. Additionally, some participants might have attended similar training previously, which may have reduced their enthusiasm for certain content.

A key lesson learned is that participant engagement depends not only on content relevance but also on factors such as timing, delivery approaches and session design. Training enhancement techniques like integrating breakout sessions, peer-learning activities, fireside chats and/or refreshed room setups could help to improve the novelty and energy throughout the sessions.

• Session Moderation

While the training delivery was largely effective, one area that revealed room for improvement was session moderation. Although the moderators were experienced in managing formal events, their style did not always fit the interactive and adaptive nature of a training programme. The moderation sometimes felt disconnected from the training rhythm, sessions were introduced mechanically, transitions lacked energy and opportunities to recap or link discussions were occasionally missed.

It became evident that effective moderation is central to maintaining learning flow. Selecting moderators with experience in adult learning facilitation and the ability to connect sessions thematically will ensure smoother transitions, stronger engagement and a more cohesive participant experience.

• Session Synchronization

With multiple concurrent sessions and facilitators working across different halls, maintaining uniform pacing and alignment proved challenging at times. Some sessions ran over their allotted time, while others ended early, occasionally affecting participant movement and the overall programme rhythm.

The team recognized that session synchronization is crucial for programme coherence. Strengthening timekeeping systems, assigning dedicated session coordinators, and integrating real-time communication among facilitators can help ensure smoother transitions, consistent pacing, and a more cohesive participant experience.

• Supply Chain Management

While the training was generally well-coordinated, challenges emerged around supply chain reliability. Dependence on a limited pool of vendors created vulnerabilities; delays or shortfalls from a single supplier sometimes disrupted the flow of materials or logistics support.

Effective supply chain management is key to operational efficiency. Future programs should include vendor mapping, advance contracting, and backup supply arrangements to minimize risk and ensure uninterrupted delivery.

• Administration of Pre- and Post-Training Evaluation Instruments

Fewer than half of the participants completed the questionnaires. Challenges included QR code accessibility, device limitations and limited time to complete them during sessions.

For large-scale trainings, supplementary approaches for measuring participant learning may be necessary. Strategies such as shorter and more focused surveys, or integrating the questionnaires directly into interactive segments could improve response rates and provide more reliable insights to guide future programme design.

• Post-Training Follow up

The training generated strong enthusiasm and immediate learning, however, formal post-training follow-up was limited. The large size of the participants (over 3,000 legislative aides from across the country) made it challenging to sustain structured engagement afterward. Logistical constraints related to travel and coordination across constituencies also prevented the use of typical follow-up strategies employed in other programs.

Sustaining learning beyond the classroom emerged as a critical area for continued impact. Subsequent large-scale training will require post-training strategies such as virtual check-ins, national/zonal peer networks or refresher sessions to ensure knowledge is reinforced, applied effectively and translated into tangible improvements in legislative support work.



“The training is very impactful and there is room for improvement.”

— Training Participant



Conclusion

The National Assembly’s capacity-building programme for legislative aides, organized by RES, demonstrates that strengthening democratic institutions requires more than technical instruction. It requires adaptive learning, intentional design and a culture that values continuous professional development. By approaching training as an institutional intervention rather than a routine workshop, the programme succeeded in equipping aides with the skills, mindset and confidence needed to support a more effective legislature. Its emphasis on customized curriculum, experiential pedagogy and responsive facilitation.

The experience also revealed areas for improvement that are essential for sustaining future gains. More consistent facilitation styles, stronger engagement techniques, improved session synchronization, diversified supply chains and more robust post-training evaluation mechanisms will strengthen the quality and longevity of learning outcomes. Additionally, the need for structured post-training follow-up underscores the reality that capacity building must extend beyond the training room if it is to produce lasting institutional impact.

Overall, the training reaffirmed a critical lesson: a strong legislature is built not only through the actions of elected members but through the competence, professionalism and preparedness of those who support them. By investing in the development of legislative aides, the National Assembly takes a significant step toward enhancing legislative effectiveness, deepening institutional memory and strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria. The insights gained from this initiative now provide a practical blueprint for designing scalable, context-sensitive capacity-building interventions capable of transforming public institutions from within.



Fig 5. Facilitator and participants during a training session

Post-Training Survey Results



Fig 6. Did the workshop meet your expectation?



Fig 7. How familiar are the sessions of the training?



Fig 8. Components to apply in personal life?



Fig 9. How useful did you find the training materials?

Note: Figs 6–9 show an overview of participant responses to the post-training survey.

Link to participants' feedback on the training:

<https://shorturl.at/OWYUW>

<https://youtu.be/OQOrDJjIIDE>

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Photo Album

