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Growth for Society: Collaborative
Governance, Social Innovation, and Public Value



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Public Administration Education, Professionalisation and Executive Learning for State Capacity, Democratic Resilience and Public Value in an Era of AI and Populism

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Rationale

This track proposes to examine how public administration education, professional training, executive and continuing education, lifelong learning, and professionalisation can strengthen state capacity, democratic resilience, and public value in an era marked by artificial intelligence, populist pressures, institutional fragility, accelerating governance complexity, digital transformation, and public trust challenges.

Governments are increasingly expected to steer digital transformation, regulate artificial intelligence, mobilise public and private actors, and respond to complex societal problems while preserving legality, accountability and the common good. At the same time, many public institutions face growing distrust, polarisation, anti-bureaucratic rhetoric and populist simplifications that challenge the legitimacy of expertise, merit, evidence-informed decision-making and professional public service.

The governance of AI, social innovation and collaborative growth depends not only on technology, regulation or partnerships. It also depends on the quality of public administration as a profession. Administrative capacity requires public servants and public leaders equipped with digital, analytical, legal, ethical, managerial and collaborative competencies. It also requires training systems, schools of government, universities and professional programmes — including robust executive and continuing



education offerings — capable of embedding public service values, institutional memory, impartiality, accountability and commitment to public value.

This track treats professionalisation and continuous executive learning not merely as human resources issues, but as core institutional mechanisms. In democratic systems, a professional, merit-based and ethically grounded public administration, supported by ongoing education and leadership development for serving officials, can operate as part of the broader architecture of checks and balances. It does not replace political authority, nor should it act as an unelected veto power. Its role is to safeguard legality, proportionality, technical competence, institutional continuity, evidence-informed advice and administrative impartiality, especially when governments are exposed to populist incentives, short-termism, politicisation or attempts to weaken institutional constraints.

Mid-career and senior public servants are expected to implement policies and navigate uncertainty, collaborative governance, organizational learning, and reform-oriented leadership. Executive and continuing education have become central to state capacity, institutional reform, and leadership development. While public administration studies has substantially examined governance, institutions, and policy systems, comparatively less attention has been devoted to how public servants themselves are continuously educated, professionally formed, and supported throughout their careers through lifelong learning, work-integrated and practice-based approaches, digital and hybrid modalities, and reflective practice that strengthens professional identity and public service values.

The track is anchored in classical and contemporary public administration theory. It welcomes contributions engaging with Weberian bureaucracy and its emphasis on legality, merit, hierarchy and impartiality; the Neo-Weberian State and its concern with combining professional capacity, responsiveness and citizen orientation; historical and sociological institutionalism, particularly regarding institutional resilience, path dependency, norms and administrative traditions; public value theory, with its focus on legitimacy, authorisation and collective outcomes; state capacity and administrative capacity approaches; New Public Management addressing new ways of connection between performance and value; and governance theories addressing networks, collaboration, accountability and the risks of capture.

In this perspective, public administration education, executive learning and professional training become part of the institutional infrastructure of democracy. They shape the knowledge, values and competencies through which public officials interpret political



mandates, advise decision-makers, implement policy, regulate markets, manage data, cooperate with private and civil society actors, and protect citizens' rights. In an era of AI and populism, the professionalisation of public administration — reinforced through continuous executive education and lifelong professional development — is therefore central to the capacity of the State to act with competence, legality and democratic legitimacy.

This track invites theoretical, empirical, comparative, policy-oriented and practice-based contributions on how education, executive training, evidence-based approaches, competency-based reforms, merit systems and lifelong learning can help public administrations govern technological disruption, resist politicisation and capture, rebuild citizens' trust in public institutions, and develop adaptive and ethical leadership.

The track is particularly interested in papers that connect public administration education, professionalisation and executive learning with broader debates on state capacity, industrial policy, democratic legitimacy, collaborative governance, social innovation, institutional robustness and public value. It welcomes contributions from scholars as well as from practitioners and leaders of schools of government and executive education programmes.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Public administration education and democratic resilience
- Professionalisation, merit and public service values as institutional safeguards
- Public administration as a check and balance in democratic governance
- State capacity and administrative capacity in the AI era
- AI governance, data literacy and ethical competencies in public administration
- Evidence-informed administration and resistance to populist simplification
- Executive education, continuing professional development and leadership formation in governance
- Lifelong learning and professionalisation in the public sector
- Work-integrated and practice-based learning for civil servants
- Digital and hybrid learning modalities for government professionals
- Competency development for adaptive governance
- Schools of government and public sector capacity-building
- Reflective practice, professional identity and public service values



- Training systems and public sector workforce transformation
- Administrative impartiality, legality and institutional continuity
- Collaborative governance without capture
- Public administration curricula and executive programmes for an era of AI, polarisation and populism
- Administrative law, accountability and algorithmic governance
- Universities, training institutes, schools of government and public organisations as capacity-building ecosystems
- Comparative models of public sector training, professionalisation and executive education

Keywords

Public administration education; professionalisation; executive education; continuing professional development; lifelong learning; state capacity; democratic resilience; populism; AI governance; public value; merit; public service values; institutionalism; checks and balances; training systems; evidence-informed policy; collaborative governance; practice-based learning; digital learning; adaptive governance; leadership formation; schools of government; reflective practice; professional identity.

Expected contribution to the conference theme

The proposed track directly contributes to the conference theme by focusing on the administrative, professional, educational and executive learning foundations required to turn growth, innovation and technological transformation into public value. The conference call emphasises collaborative governance, social innovation, industrial policy, public value, AGI, human capital, ethical regulation, bureaucratic capacity and institutional design. This track addresses the professional and institutional infrastructure that makes those ambitions possible: capable public servants, competent public leaders, merit-based systems, robust training institutions, schools of government, and executive education oriented towards democratic responsibility, adaptive leadership and public value creation.

While debates on collaborative governance, AGI, social innovation and renewed strategic statehood often focus on institutional design, technology, industrial policy or public-private partnerships, this track asks a prior and complementary question: what kind of



public administration — and what kind of continuous education and professional formation for its people — is needed to govern these transformations without weakening legality, accountability, merit and democratic legitimacy?

The track is expected to attract contributions from scholars, practitioners and executive education leaders working on public administration education, schools of government, public sector training, AI governance, public sector competencies, administrative reform, merit systems, democratic resilience, institutionalism and comparative public administration. As the anchor track of the education and capacity-building cluster, it provides an international platform for consolidating emerging research, comparative experiences, innovative practices and practitioner insights in this vital field.

We would be pleased to co-chair this track and to collaborate with the conference organisers in refining its scope, identifying possible additional discussants if needed, reviewing submissions and organising the accepted contributions into coherent sessions that reflect both theoretical depth and practical relevance for working public sector professionals.



Practicalities

Key Links

- Conference website: <https://www.iias-iisa.org/iias-2026-conference/>
- Submission system: <https://www.conftool.org/iias2026/>
- Contact: iias-conference@iias-iisa.org

Important Dates

- Abstract / Panel submission deadline: **30 August 2026**
- Notification of acceptance and opening of registration: **30 August 2026**
- Full paper submission and registration deadline: **4 October 2026**

Submission Guidelines

- Unless otherwise specified in the track call, abstracts are limited to **500 words**. They should clearly outline the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, main findings (or expected findings), and implications.
- Accepted abstracts are expected to be developed into full papers.
- **Panels** are session proposals submitted under the main conference theme. A panel proposal includes a title, abstract, proposed chairperson(s), and a list of expected presentations. Panels are not required to produce full papers.

Evaluation

Proposals (papers and panels) are evaluated by the chair(s) (or co-chairs) of the track to which they are submitted. Evaluation criteria include:

- Academic quality and rigour
- Relevance to the track theme and overall conference theme
- Thematic fit and originality
- Clarity and quality of presentation

Paper Requirements

- Maximum length: **6,000 words** (all inclusive, including references).
- Structure: abstract, introduction, main body (developing the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, and implications), conclusion, and references.

