



Moving Capital Towards Impact

# **AVPN Global Leadership Academy**


*Prototype*





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## **Introduction**

This document outlines the process of running the Global Leadership Academy (GLA), based on AVPN's experience of designing and developing the initiative over 12 months. We see the GLA prototype not as a product or a curriculum, but a process, and in what follows, we describe this process in as much detail as possible.

This prototype document can always be refined in the future. As GLA embraces the principles of designed serendipity, co-creation, and working with what emerges, there will always be several unknowns to manage in implementation.

Through this document, we hope to enable the replicability of GLA at scale. The process of scaling up the initiative depends on the quality of facilitation, and developing a train-the-facilitator programme is of interest to us. Sharing this prototype widely is the beginning of that journey.

The following subsections detail the narrative of GLA and the core elements of the process.





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# The narrative



# 1: The narrative

The Global Leadership Academy (GLA) aims to contribute to more and better support to localised solutions coming from the Global South and offer impact leaders a leadership development experience that focuses on diversity, inclusion, uncertainty, and complexity.

It focuses on two key aspects to achieve the goal:

## *i) Enabling localisation*

The GLA aims to facilitate the shift to localised solutions through improved decision-making by impact leaders and funders as a result of having access to deeper and locally rooted insights and wisdom. It seeks to empower changemakers active within the Global South to learn from each other, utilising their own narratives and frameworks.

Access to these deeper insights and dynamics can only happen if we can amplify unheard voices, particularly from historically underrepresented groups such as women, grassroots leaders, and people with disabilities, and recalibrate power dynamics. Within GLA, participants can take ownership of what they want to learn and share, and can explore how that works best for them. They also support each other in how to apply those learnings in their actions.

It is important to note that it is not because we bring a great group of people together that they will openly share. In a diverse group with several personal and power dynamics at play, sharing will only happen when people feel safe and brave. That is why within GLA we design a space governed by what we call 'humanised relationships'. Rooted in empathy, trust, and understanding, these 'humanised' relationships prioritise genuine connections and emphasise the importance of understanding and addressing root causes alongside empowering communities to drive equitable outcomes. Transactional relationships, on the other hand, prioritise delivery of outputs and activities with little opportunity for the parties to interact as individuals. Transactional relationships can only take us so far.

## *ii) Developing leadership*

By participating in GLA, impact leaders gain first-hand experience in building deeper connections in a context defined by diversity and inclusion, in embracing complexity, and in feeling more comfortable in situations with a strong degree of unpredictability. These are all crucial competencies for effective leadership in today's dynamic and interconnected impact ecosystem.

GLA focuses on creating an environment to share wisdom and identify collective insights through authentic and spontaneous interaction, rather than facilitating specific technical skill building through rigid or structured knowledge exchange. The goal is to create a sense of immersion over the course of the programme.



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# The process



## 2: The process

The process consists of four different phases, each with distinct characteristics:

1. Identify the leaders,
2. Prepare the ground,
3. Convene an in-person workshop,
4. Build the GLA community.

Typically, the GLA process requires 5-6 months, from preparation to alumni engagement.

### 2.1. Identify the leaders

*Duration: 6-8 weeks*

The composition of the group is key to the success of any GLA cohort, and this necessitates time investment. Key principles in this step include:

#### *i) Diversity*

While most training programs prefer a group where everyone starts at the same level or have similar profiles, the GLA believes in the true power of diversity and the importance of intentionally bringing very different entry points into the room. This diversity comes through different angles: age, gender, position, geography, thematic, type of actors (such as grassroots organisations, funder, intermediary, etc), personality, and so on.

#### *ii) Inclusivity*

Inclusivity for People with Disabilities (PWDs) has been and will remain an essential ingredient of all elements of the GLA process: from identifying the participants and organising the logistics to the design of all formats we use. The presence of people with different types of disability is essential as they bring a very different lived experience and perspective. It is of utmost importance that we design all the processes so that this group of participants can fully and actively participate.

#### *iii) Designed serendipity*

The success of the GLA depends on having people in the room that learning programmes normally do not reach. Therefore the typical outreach strategies, for instance, a call for applications, are not appropriate. Instead, we implement designed serendipity. A main characteristic of designed serendipity is that we become very sensitive to unexpected encounters and unusual references: the person who is standing next to us at the coffee machine at an impact investing conference, a recommendation from a random impact leader who speak to us in an unrelated conversation, a friend of a friend who connects us to a community leader in an area they work with, and so on. We take recommendations from these encounters to curate the participant list.

### *iii) No selection process*

Selection entails exclusion, and this goes against the principles of GLA. There are no application forms, interviews, or selection committees for GLA participation. When we have a list of 18-20 participants from the designed serendipity process, the participant identification stops because the principle is that this group is the right group. From that point, we review the list of leaders to ensure the group composition has diversity in sector, geography, rural-urban segregation, age, organisation size, and gender.

The team will then have individual conversations with each potential candidate. The GLA experience is easier to express in conversation than in writing, making it important to move quickly from 'written exchanges' to a personal conversation. At this point, the team will explore the alignment of GLA with the candidate's personal and professional experience, goals, interests, and values. If there is a sense of alignment, the candidate is invited without any further process.

## **2.2. Prepare the ground**

*Duration: 8-12 weeks, in parallel with identifying the leaders*

This step begins by deciding the location (city, country) of the in-person workshop. Ideally this is also decided through a designed serendipity approach. We carefully consider ideas for workshop location which surface in conversation, without disregarding any recommendations, regardless of how unusual they are. The duration and the loose structure of the agenda are adjusted based on the dynamics and profiles of leaders who will be part of the cohort.

Another element is whether or not facilitators with regional expertise and resources are necessary. It is important also to think intentionally about the diverse needs of the leaders, for instance, PWDs, and ensure they are well-represented, feel valued, and accommodated. Every logistical aspect, from venue selection, transportation, visa application, and others, must accommodate the diverse needs of the leaders. Inclusivity must be incorporated at every stage, drawing on the expertise of funders and direct input from leaders to understand their specific requirements. We engage directly with the leaders to refine inclusivity policies and practices.

The team also documents the journey of every GLA programme and share insights with a wider audience. To this end, it is imperative to plan the collaboration with media partners accordingly to create audiovisual materials that authentically capture the experiences and perspectives of impact leaders, thereby enhancing external awareness and outreach efforts.

## 2.3. Convene an in-person workshop

*Duration: 4 days 3 nights*

The cohort, or group of impact leaders who agree to be part of the GLA programme, will meet for an immersive workshop designed to be an experience that touches the individual as a person, as well as a professional. Participants co-own the process of learning, direct their learning agenda, share different perspectives and are empowered to discuss and learn what they find relevant. In a space where power dynamics are neutralised, leaders explore first-hand how to remain open to what emerges, how to flourish in a diverse and inclusive environment, and how to embrace complexity.

All the details matter. The in-city travel, venue design, sites and places that the cohort visits; the restaurants, food, and entertainment they experience: everything is intentionally designed to contribute to more human connections. The aspect of utmost importance for GLA is creating a sense of belonging within each cohort. From the first contact, the GLA team ensures that leaders feel welcome and goes out of their way to offer all the support they need. Creating a safe, and, more importantly, a brave space, is a critical pathway to a deeper experience.

The typical workshop flow is as follows.

### **Day 0: Arriving**

- *Late afternoon – Check in.* As international travel for some leaders can be quite long, the flexibility to have early check-in for leaders who arrive early in the morning or late at night is important.
- *Evening – Welcome dinner.* All participants meet for the first time at the welcome dinner. The dinner has no structured agenda, and its main objective is to allow leaders to familiarise themselves with one another in an unofficial setting. The venue for the welcome dinner is typically a restaurant serving traditional local cuisine with strong local cultural elements embedded in it. A private space in a small or historical restaurant will be ideal. If possible, it is best to design the dinner so leaders can sit together and share food collectively.



Image 1: GLA Luknow participants connected over a home-cooked, traditional Awadhi cuisine



Image 2: GLA Istanbul cohort took a picture together after a traditional Turkish dinner

## Day 1: Connecting

- *Part 1 (1 hour) – The Opening.* The workshop kicks off with a welcome from the team, highlighting the nature and specificity of the workshop. It is important to add a personal angle to the welcome - so set the appropriate tone for the group dynamic. The welcome is followed by short individual introductions and icebreakers. The Opening concludes with co-creating the rules and norms which will guide the group throughout the workshop.
- *Part 2 (2 hours) – Connect with oneself and with one another.* To connect with their own intentions, the participants are invited to visualise their expectations of the workshop. The visuals are kept at the centre of the circle which is used for the group exchanges during the workshop. This is followed by the Tree of Life exercise which allows the participants to connect with one another at a deeper level. The tree of life is a creative activity that uses the tree as a metaphor to narrate stories about one's life. Leaders are encouraged to envision a tree, its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc., with each part symbolising different aspects of their lives. This is a two-person exercise. It will be followed by group sharing focusing on how the story of your counterpart touched you. This helps facilitate a deeper level of intimacy and trust within the group.
- *Part 3 (After lunch, 4 hours) – Connect with local communities through site visits.* The afternoon of the first day focuses on creating high-touch immersive experiences in the field through visiting local impact initiatives and having open exchanges with local leaders and communities. The group composition for the site visits is not predetermined but based on serendipity. Leaders reflect on and discuss their experiences with their respective groups on their return from the visit.
- *Part 4 (Evening) – Connect with the host city through local experiences (optional).* The participants who live in the host city are encouraged to take others into the city. The diversity of the experience is encouraged just as to embrace what is emerging as an activity (dinner, shopping, visiting a special place, and others). This is an optional activity: after an intense day, some participants will prefer to have a quiet evening without interaction.



Image 3: The Opening of the GLA in-person workshop in Istanbul



Image 4: Connecting with local communities in Lucknow

## Day 2: Exploring

- *Part 1 (30 minutes) – Dance & games.* Locally rooted Icebreakers, dances, or games strengthen the informality and intimacy of the group dynamic and build a sense of intercultural sensitivity within the group. It is ideal if a group of participants leads this activity.
- *Part 2 (2 hours) – Listening exercise.* The participants are asked to reflect on how they experienced the first day using a guided listening exercise. It is a methodology for listening and understanding emotions, intentions, and context while attending to non-verbal cues. This approach has several guidelines, such as no probing questions, speakers must be able to speak uninterrupted, and others. Participants will do two steps of conversation: the first one is a 1:1 conversation, followed by a small group exchange, before sharing impressions with the full group.
- *Part 3 (30 minutes) – Dance & games.* As above, it is ideal if a group of participants leads this activity.
- *Part 4 (2.5 hours) – Open Space: Taking ownership of the agenda.* Inspired by 'Open Space Technology' (OST), this session allows the participants to take ownership of what they want to learn from each other. Starting with one broad guiding question (e.g. What challenges and opportunities do you want to explore deeper with fellow participants?) individual leaders are invited to propose specific topics to discuss - and are following the key ingredients of OST. This exercise allows the leaders to insert their narrative and put their agenda on the table without any intervention from anyone else but their own group.
- *Part 5 (1 hour) – Iteration to identify unanswered questions.* The last session on the second day explores leaders' unanswered questions and/or any activities they want to do on the morning of the following day. This could be more conversations, or arranging a design sprint to prototype certain programmes proposed by leaders, or other activities that we could not foresee for the time being. It will be decided entirely by the participants.
- *Part 6 (Evening) – Group dinner.* Similar to the Welcome Dinner, the selection for the group dinner on the last evening of the workshop must be intentional: local and traditional restaurants with history, social purposes or nuances to share would be ideal.



Image 5: GLA Lucknow participants playing a traditional Indian game



Image 6: Discussions in the Open Spaces Technology

### Day 3: Sensemaking

- *Part 1 (30 minutes) – Dance & games.* Similar to the previous day, the last day opens with games and icebreakers led by a group of leaders who have yet to lead the activities of the previous day.
- *Part 2 (2.5 hours) – Follow-up from Day 2.* This agenda item is reserved as a follow-up of Part 5 of the second day.
- *Part 3 (2 hours) – Sensemaking and reflections.* In the last session of the workshop, leaders reflect on their time in the workshop so far and share learnings and activities that they find valuable over the past three days. The workshop concludes with a visual of the respective intentions and a round of personal feedback.



Image 7: GLA Lucknow participants playing a traditional Japanese game



Image 8: Ending the workshop by reflecting at the visual of intentions

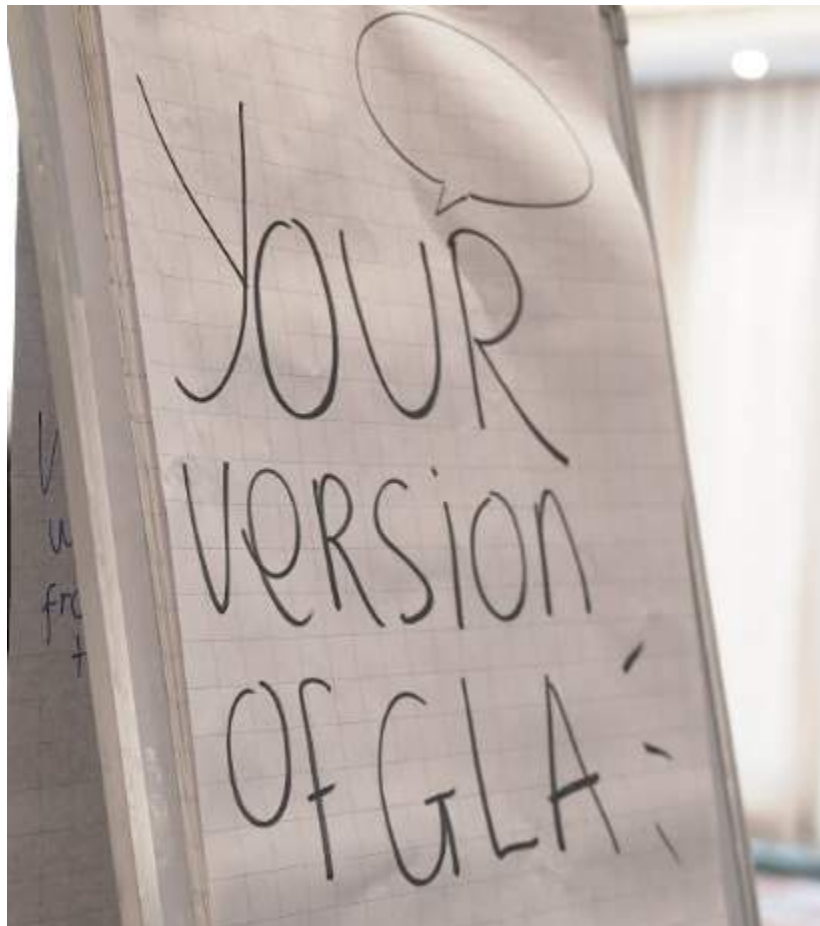


Image 9: Participants directing the agenda with a session designed to address their unanswered questions

## 2.4. Build the GLA community

*Duration: post-workshop; no limitation on the timeframe*

Once the in-person workshop is concluded, all leaders become part of the GLA community. This group of local, regional, and global leaders represent a wide spectrum of those working in the Global South, from grassroots leaders to international funders. Throughout the year, the community is:

- An active platform for information sharing, connecting, and mentoring;
- A space for joint initiatives by the impact leaders/alumni, i.e. South-south podcast and others;
- A growing list of skills and resources;
- A door to opportunities at global and regional events and convenings.

As part of the post-workshop activities, the team has a conversation with leaders to connect the leaders with their alumni from other cohorts and to discuss how the GLA programme contributed to their work and life in the months after the workshop.




## About The Global Leadership Academy

The Global Leadership Academy (GLA) is a South-south learning platform that contributes to strengthening localised solutions through improved decision-making by impact leaders and funders as a result of having access to deeper and locally rooted insights and wisdom.

Between June 2023 and June 2024, a small team from AVPN went through a design process, including two pilot workshops and alumni engagement, that has resulted in a prototype GLA model for AVPN and others to adopt to enhance learning and engagement across the Global South.

We are open to collaboration. Write to us at [gla@avpn.asia](mailto:gla@avpn.asia) to explore ways to collectively unlock the wisdom of the Global South.





AVPN is a unique funders' network committed to building a vibrant and high impact social investment ecosystem across Asia. AVPN is catalysing more strategic and collaborative social investment from philanthropy to impact investing, addressing key social challenges facing Asia today and in the future.



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