ENERGY TRANSITION ACADEMY

RMI facilitating a minigrid training session for the Ethiopian Electric Utility in 2019

KEY AUDIENCES

The Academy will primarily target senior- and mid-level energy practitioners in utilities, renewable and distributed energy companies, and regulatory bodies. Secondarily, the Academy will target politicians, policymakers, and influencers who can enable the transition.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

In the near term, the Academy will focus on a set of prioritized developing country regions and emerging markets with a focus on geographies where RMI has on-the-ground operations including sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and island nations. Over time, the Academy will be expanded to support the energy transition globally, with a focus on underserved communities.

SECTOR FOCUS

The Academy will focus on electricity system transformation in the context of the overall energy transition, with ancillary focus on sectors that interface with the electricity system such as transportation and building electrification.

THE PROBLEM

There is an urgent need to decarbonize the energy sector to align with a 1.5°C pathway and prevent unchecked climate change. This urgency, coupled with the decreasing cost of clean energy technologies, has led to an energy landscape that is changing rapidly across the globe to favor renewables and other new energy technologies. At the same time, there is a need to provide electricity access to the nearly one billion people who lack it while also tackling energy justice and keeping pace with new technologies and higher levels of customer participation.

Within this context, energy practitioners across the global electricity sector are struggling to make informed decisions at the pace required to combat climate change while also meeting their economic growth targets. Practitioners, especially in developing countries, lack access to curated/tailored information relevant to the unique problems and decisions they are dealing with in their day-to-day responsibilities. They also lack access to real-time global expertise.

Many past and current capacity-building efforts aim to combat these issues but tend to be top-down and limited in time and scope, and fail to fully consider the wide range of challenges faced by these practitioners in their day-to-day operations. These efforts may have achieved incremental change at times, but they have not led to a transformational shift in behavior change at the scale and pace required to address the climate challenge. Still missing from the global energy sector are opportunities and platforms for energy practitioners to learn directly from each other and connect with global peers committed to confronting similar challenges.

THE SOLUTION

The power of technical and leadership training, hands-on coaching, and peer-to-peer knowledge networks is proven. However, it has not yet been utilized at scale to build transboundary connections among private- and public-sector electricity system professionals from countries that may have very different histories and characteristics. RMI's global experience has shown us that there is a need for a deeper level of collaboration among electricity system professionals. This collaboration must be grounded in technical and leadership development content that provides decision makers with the confidence, tools, and information to make important power sector-related decisions in the context of high uncertainty and transformative opportunity.

To build the necessary capacity and confidence needed to achieve a 1.5°C pathway in developing countries, RMI and our global partners are creating the Academy.

The Academy will respond to the tailored needs and demands of energy practitioners in prioritized developing country regions, providing flexible and cost-effective support where it is most needed.

The idea for the Academy originates from requests and suggestions RMI has received directly from energy practitioners. The Academy's design will therefore be demand-responsive and address the unique concerns of these stakeholders. RMI is currently undertaking a detailed assessment of target stakeholder needs and existing capacity-building efforts and platforms to determine the final design of the Academy. However, as a point of departure, the aim of the Academy at concept stage is to provide curated information, training, tools, best-in-class analytics, peer-to-peer problem-solving, and coaching networks that collectively address the daily challenges of decision makers and practitioners.

THE APPROACH

The Academy's methodological approach will deliver accelerated impact at scale via the following capacity-building continuum framework:

Awareness > Understanding > Support > Commitment > Action

In reflection of this framework, RMI's current hypothesis is that the Academy will consist of three mutually reinforcing pillars: a global learning platform, an energy leadership accelerator, and a curated experience exchange program. These three pillars are described in further detail in the table below. At each stage of the continuum, the Academy will bring energy professionals together to share challenges and learnings specific to their markets and environment.

Pillar	Need	Description	Components
Learning Platform[i]	Curated content, training, one-stop shop for best practices, templates, peer-to-peer exchanges	Tailored knowledge exchange platform informed by on-the-ground learnings. Information will be generated by (sub) regional communities of practice and curated by a centralized team of knowledge management experts into practical trainings. The platform will inter-connect practitioners and communities of practice through well-designed exchanges.	• Training courses • Curated information, reports, and case studies • Vetted repository of templates and tools • Access to global experts • Global peer network platform
Energy Leadership Accelerator	Leadership training and networks designed to provide confidence in making informed decisions	Foster collaboration and co-create solutions to institutional, regulatory, business, economic, and technical barriers typical in the power sector.	• Community of practice network • Training workshops • Fellowships • Digital content and technical reports • On-call technical assistance to inform real-time decisions
Experience Exchange Program	Hands-on experience with real-time projects and decision-making in peer settings	Facilitate intraregional project visits to interlinked on-the-ground renewable energy projects, institutional policy and regulatory programs, and community projects to gain firsthand knowledge applicable to participants' home countries.	• Informational project site visits • Regulator/utility exchange programs

[ii] The learning platform will NOT be a static menu of services, but a conduit to allow stakeholders to measure their learning experience, access repositories of content on demand, and build upon progress. The post-COVID world will require digital bridges to expedite action on climate change and energy security. The learning platform will be tailored to enhance partner access to content and minimize travel.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

We will test out the hypothesis in a subset of target geographies and then scale up the proposed three pillars over three years. At this stage, we believe it is critical to (1) conduct additional due diligence within our specific target geographies to ensure that we are taking a demand-driven design approach, (2) listen intently to understand the challenges and decisions that target beneficiaries are dealing with in their day to day, and (3) start quickly and leverage a rapid cycle prototyping approach to ensure the Academy is as effective and efficiently implemented as possible.

Initially, membership in the Academy will be drawn primarily from RMI and partner organization stakeholders to ensure the platform is grounded in real-world projects and challenges. Champions will be identified to act as content providers to the training curriculum and raise the profile of the Academy with peers. RMI will also review existing learning platforms—including the RMI-supported Caribbean Renewable Energy Community virtual platform (**https://community.carilec.org/**)—to determine how the learning platform can enhance already established e-learning platforms and not re-invent the wheel. This process will utilize open-source tools and leverage partnerships to facilitate a level of interoperability with existing platforms.

The quality of knowledge curated and the service offerings will be continually assessed via a robust evaluation system and partner feedback.

PHASING			
	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
Focus	Rapid review of existing platforms, establish basic infrastructure, and test and evolve core components with early adopter participants	Build out all pillars and scale participation	Deepen user/participant experience via software improvements and participant feedback
Activities	• Strengthen or establish regional communities of practice • Create tailored content plan for learning management infrastructure, including document repository and training curriculum • Identify global experts • Design initial leadership and project exchange programs • Hold virtual technical and leadership training workshops to build trust • Assess need for formal certification vs. informal support • Assess need to expand scope to include mobility	• Scale the Energy Leadership Accelerator • Scale the fellowship program and identify and match appropriate participants • If formal certification program is pursued, align with globally recognized certification programs • Foster project exchanges between regions where common challenges/solutions are identified • Curate participant-led best practices to build confidence in Academy service offerings	• Improve content/training modules • Review participant patterns on how they use and respond to knowledge products • Partner with technical schools from participant regions to encourage R&D and innovations

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES

RMI'S APPROACH

RMI has a 20-plus year proven track record with capacity building, virtual peer-to-peer exchanges, and training experience. RMI's Electricity Innovation Lab (eLab) is widely seen by industry experts as a world-class leadership accelerator platform. The Caribbean Renewable Energy Community was established with the goal to facilitate knowledge exchange within the Caribbean. It now has more than 3,000 active participants from over 40 countries. Finally, RMI holds deep relationships with the private sector and proven experience in leveraging public/philanthropic funding to crowd-in commercial investment.

Based on our deep experience, we have learned that several key principles are applicable to the energy context when establishing a community-led platform. As such, some of the differentiating characteristics of the Academy include:

Demand-led approach

Listening intently to understand root problems, providing flexible support, and organizing stakeholders around common problems. Providing practical tools—through a system and faculty that are available over a longer period of time—that address the barriers and challenges identified by the leaders we're trying to work with.

Common infrastructure

Shared resources and tools, showing how the learning platform makes it more cost-effective to develop and deliver training or leadership development (especially remote/online), but also to align and coordinate training across different donors or organizations.

Collaborative models

Peer-to-peer learning, facilitated and interactive problem-solving approaches through cohorts, with a focus on institutional strengthening over time (rather than a series of disconnected, one-off training sessions).

Quality assurance

A guarantee that training provided through the learning platform will be world-class, responsive to changing dynamics, and contextually relevant, and can embrace the complexity of the sector, by applying holistic approaches and systems thinking.

Networks

Beyond the strengthening of existing communities of practice and the establishment of new ones where they do not exist, foster the legitimacy of country groups (such as civil society), creating networks of universities and specialists who understand local contexts.

Focus on equity and gender

Significant emphasis on gender, diversity, and inclusion through targeted participation of under-represented groups, and embedding diversity training.

Process improvement

Robust systems to track our impact, starting with the implementation of a clear monitoring, evaluation, and learning approach to continually improve service offerings.

We have designed the Academy to integrate these principles and capitalize on what other efforts have done well. We will take new approaches where they have had less success and build on our global experience in deploying leading-edge approaches to support leadership development and capacity building.

PARTNERS

National, regional and international partnerships will be critical to the success of the Academy. Institutional partners will be needed at each stage of the initiative. RMI will engage potential partners during the detailed stakeholder needs assessment process. Once formal partners are identified, roles and respective comparative advantages will be defined.

INDICATIVE BUDGET

RMI and confirmed partners will seek a total of US$8.2 million in funding, spread over three years, to develop the Academy and prove out the concept. Below is a high-level summary of the proposed budget for development of the Academy service offerings, including RMI operations costs:

Item	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	Total
Learning Platform	$1,000,000	$150,000	$150,000	$1,300,000
Leadership Accelerator	$500,000	$1,000,000	$1,250,000	$2,750,000
Experience Exchange Program	$350,000	$1,500,000	$2,000,000	$3,850,000
Monitoring & Evaluation	$100,000	$100,000	$100,000	$300,000
Total	**$1,950,000**	**$2,750,000**	**$3,500,000**	**$8,200,000**

Budget Assumptions

*Learning Platform: Year 1 is for platform establishment and beyond Year 1 the budget is for standard platform and technology enhancements.

*Leadership Accelerator: Year 1 includes primarily planning and scoping for Year 2 and 3 in-person Accelerator events.

*Experience Exchange Program: Year 1 includes planning and scoping for Year 2 and 3 Exchange Program implementation.

*RMI Operations: The core RMI team will manage roughly 80%–85% of the execution of the ETA, the other 15%–20% may be external consultants.

ANNEX RMI CURRENT CAPACITY-BUILDING EFFORTS

RMI is a nonprofit, non-partisan think tank that has worked on transformative power sector issues since 1982. RMI leverages an unparalleled network of relationships with the most innovative stakeholders from around the world. RMI's Electricity Innovation Lab (eLab) was launched in 2012 to overcome silos of ideas and solution development between power sector stakeholders. Through eLab, RMI convenes 12 to 15 project teams each year to problem solve with regulators, utilities, industry experts, and civil society.

RMI holds close relationships with leading utilities in North America, the Caribbean, India, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. RMI provided direct technical assistance to utilities in Africa, including Nigeria's Abuja and Ibadan Electricity Distribution Companies, Ethiopian Electric Utility, and Rwanda Energy Group. In India, RMI leads the Discom Transformation Platform with state utilities in Rajasthan and Haryana. RMI additionally supports most member utilities in the Caribbean Electric Utility Services Corporation (CARILEC) and has supported utility innovation through Australia's ALab Innovation as well as EBP's eLab Chile.

RMI is currently working on leadership development and capacity building across roughly 75% of our program portfolio, targeting geographies ranging from India and China to the United States and sectors including electricity, mobility, buildings, and urban transformation. The Academy will build on RMI's existing portfolio and experience across several RMI programs. These include:

- A regional community of practice in the Caribbean (the CARILEC Renewable Energy Community, or CAREC)[ii] that has been pivotal in establishing a collaborative environment for subject matter experts in the Caribbean to connect and share best practices and innovations. CAREC has strengthened the technical capacity of its community of utilities and clean energy professionals, and is currently active in 38 UN member states with a membership of 1,400 including 59 utilities.
- Ethiopia Electric Utility Leadership Training for CEOs of regional utilities in Ethiopia, organized by USEA.
- Ethiopia-Uganda Energy Efficiency Project Exchange between a set of Ethiopian officials responsible for energy efficiency regulations and their Ugandan counterparts, to exchange learning and best practices.
- Ethiopia Minigrids Training aimed at supporting the utility to accelerate procurement and deployment of minigrids. The training drew on the expertise from RMI Islands, Africa, and partners at ITT in India.
- Malawi Renewable Investment De-Risking Capacity Building Program with the Ministry of Energy and the newly formed Single Buyer Unit to de-risk and accelerate renewable energy investment in the sector through better planning and PPA negotiation. In-country consultant liaises with government officials to channel expertise from RMI and GREENMAP (for PPA negotiation and project financial structuring).
- Global Environment Facility Africa Minigrid Program aimed at creating a community of practice bringing together utilities, regulators, and government officials involved in minigrid programs. It uses a cohort approach to address key problems (e.g., three regulators have facilitated meetings over six months to propose the best solution to minigrid tariff design and reported out to the others).
- The Electricity Innovation Lab was created to bring leading energy practitioners together to solve key problems at the frontier of the energy transition. eLab addresses the complexity of the electricity sector's competing motivations, extensive regulation, and information asymmetry by convening those who can change this industry's trajectory. Within each engagement, the eLab approach creates trust and accelerates the pace at which collaborators succeed.
- Renewable Energy Buyers Association (REBA) is a membership association for large-scale energy buyers seeking to procure renewable energy across the United States. Today, our membership of over 200 includes stakeholders from across the commercial and industrial sector, nonprofit organizations, energy providers, and service providers.

[ii] CAREC is fully owned and operated by CARILEC. To access more information, please go to **http://community.carilec.org/ and www.carilec.org**