

My Experience As An APRICOT 2024 Fellow

The Knowledge Gathered from the Cyberwar Defence Workshop Course

I am thrilled to share my experience of attending the workshop course during APRICOT 2024, particularly as it was my inaugural in-person workshop overseas. The workshop, titled "Cyberwar Defence - Prepare your Organization to be Resilient under Persistent Threats," marked a significant milestone in my professional development journey.

As a first-time participant in an in-person workshop abroad, I was filled with anticipation and excitement since I had the opportunity to immerse myself in a new learning environment, surrounded by industry peers from diverse backgrounds, which was truly exhilarating.

Moreover, throughout the workshop sessions, I was introduced to a range of topics, mainly including Malware & Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) resiliency architectures. These topics equipped us with the knowledge to help large organizations protect against cyber threats proactively. Another area that the workshop covered was Incident Response Plans, Playbooks, and Exercises. This topic increased my awareness about responding to critical incidents that might cause unexpected events such as DDOS, Ransomware, etc., while explaining the stages of incident response and necessary actions required for each stage. The final topic covered was Essential Security Habits that Find, Respond, and Mitigate the Threats. This topic gave me a deeper insight into how to stay updated about the latest cybersecurity threat actors by making use of the "Five Eyes for Digital Safety," which consists of a set of organizations regularly updating the public on cyber threats.

Apart from that, I am grateful for the advice the instructors, Barry Greene and Roland Dobbins, gave me on how to build my network by utilizing the FIRST organization. Since I work for a national CERT, it would be helpful for us to know more details regarding certain threat actors and provide us a medium to share our thoughts about incidents. Furthermore, I was introduced to some new tools by Barry and Roland that would greatly benefit me and my organization. Additionally, I was able to interact with a fellow participant and plan to work on some projects together in the future to help secure an online learning environment.

Despite being a newcomer to the setting, I found the content to be engaging and thought-provoking, sparking newfound enthusiasm for learning and growth. Reflecting on my time at the workshop, I am grateful for the opportunity to step outside my comfort zone and expand my horizons in a new and unfamiliar setting. The skills and knowledge acquired during this workshop will undoubtedly serve as a solid foundation for my professional endeavors moving forward.

Lessons Learnt from the Soft Skills Training

The Soft Skills workshop was particularly enlightening. Developing strong soft skills is crucial for professionals working at a national CERT, effective communication and leadership abilities are essential for handling cyber incidents and collaborating with various stakeholders. Therefore, I found the Soft Skills Development Session at APRICOT 2024 highly beneficial.

The topic "Learning Presentation Skills" session provided valuable insights on creating compelling content and engaging an audience. I find these skills crucial for communicating technical findings to diverse groups, including policymakers, industry partners, and the general public. Furthermore, this session helped me overcome nervousness and master body language and voice, enabling me to deliver impactful presentations that drive action and understanding.

The leadership part of the workshop also played a key role in developing essential leadership qualities tailored to my current professional environment. Understanding different leadership approaches and enhancing decision-making abilities are vital for guiding teams during incident response and fostering collaboration in the cybersecurity community. Through interactive activities such as group discussions and scenario-based role-playing, we fellows gained practical experience in navigating complex situations and making informed decisions under pressure.

These acquired soft skills are essential for professionals in the cybersecurity field, enabling effective communication of technical insights, inspiring confidence in stakeholders, and leading teams to mitigate cyber threats. Special thanks to session facilitators William Stockbridge, Terry Sweetser, Aftab Siddiqui, and Sarah Lake for providing this valuable opportunity for growth and development.

I found this training session to be especially beneficial, as it provided practical strategies and techniques that I can directly apply to my day-to-day tasks. This workshop not only enhanced my existing skill set but also inspired me to explore new approaches and methodologies in my work while planning to be engaging in more activities like this that would take me out of my comfort zone.

Experiences and Connections from the Conference Week.

During the conference week, I engaged in a multitude of sessions and activities that broadened my understanding of various topics within the realm of operational technology, IoT, information security, and computer networking. From keynote speeches to interactive panel discussions and countries presenting their NOG reports, it was quite informative, while each session provided unique insights and perspectives.

In addition, I found the “APRICOT 2024 Newcomers Social” to be a really good starting point to seize the opportunity to network with industry peers and experts, fostering meaningful connections that I believe will prove invaluable in my career journey. Furthermore, I found the APNIC booth to be a place where I was able to connect with some great minds and connect with the APNIC staff while sharing ideas about cybersecurity. I also had the opportunity to be a member of the “Internet Society,” which would be a quite resourceful journey.

Moreover, I was able to interact with industry experts and get to know about a CERT initiative that would be beneficial for the society where I would be resourceful in helping with it. Their valuable perspectives and recommendations highlighting the collaborative and supportive atmosphere within the APRICOT community were highly appreciated.

My Overall Impression Of APRICOT 2024

Reflecting on my experience as an APRICOT 2024 Fellow, I'm grateful for the enriching opportunities it provided. The “Cyberwar Defence” Workshop Course and Soft Skills Development Session were particularly insightful, enhancing my knowledge and abilities in cybersecurity and communication which would be applied to my work at Sri Lanka's national CERT. The conference week expanded my horizons through engaging sessions and networking opportunities, fostering valuable connections within the APRICOT 2024 community. Moreover, I would like to sincerely thank the fellowship committee, organizing committee along with fellowship chairs and APNOG board for organizing this unforgettable and successful event. Overall, I'm excited to leverage these experiences and connections in my future endeavors, while sincerely hoping that more young minds in the industry would have the rare opportunity to participate on future APRICOT events.