RDA – Value and Engagement

# Introduction

The RDA is an organisation of approximately 4000 individual members and 40+ organizational members. The intersection between these two groups is important when considering how and why orgnisations choose to engage with the RDA.

On an individual level, registering for the RDA (<https://rd-alliance.org/user/register>) is free and is not intended to require any formal approval process. Organisational membership is a different issue. Organisational membership does require a formal approval process by the RDA, and a formalized commitment from the petitioning organizational assembly (OA) member. These differences imply a separate set of expectations on the parts of both RDA and organizational members for level of engagement and extent of value provided. The matter at hand is to articulate the engagement expectations and value propositions for organisational members, and to recommend future actions that could enhance an environment where value springs from engagement and engagement generates value.

The RDA currently has some 4000 individual members[[1]](#footnote-1). The number of people attending any particular plenary meeting is around one order of magnitude less, whereas the number of organisations that are members or associates is around 40 – yet another order of magnitude lower.

On the other hand, each member organisation probably sends several people to the plenaries and so attendance from these organisations may be as much as a third – or even a half – of the total attendance.

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Organisational membership, on the other hand, almost certainly does (although in some cases the “decision makers” are directly involved and do not require any additional approval. It is likely that many organisations require regular reports as to developments within, as well as because of, the RDA[[2]](#footnote-2). These are reports made by the organisational members to their own organisations.

The individuals that make up the RDA range from deep technical experts to more experienced people with up to decades of knowledge – this is a very significant value that should not be overlooked.

Whereas they probably do not work more than – or even as much as – 20% of their time directly on RDA issues (except in some special cases), they may work as much as 80-100% on “RDA related” issues, such as data sharing, curation, management and so forth.

However, the fact that there is a group tasked to look into these matters suggests that there is a feeling that the Value to organisations that are members, or the Engagement of said members / organisations, could be increased (from this already significant base).

# What Are Organisational Assembly Members?

(From https://rd-alliance.org/organisation/rda-organisation-affiliate-members.html).

Organisations that join RDA recognize their future health and growth is dependent on realizing value from research data. They are organisations that recognize the insights that will determine their futures may well come from data created outside their organisations. Because their “genius” is unlocking value, organisations that join RDA recognize systems that enable free trade in data are critical to their future and that of their competitors, collaborators, and societies. Unlocking value from research data is the key competitive advantage in the 21st century. RDA and its members are at the heart of building a new economic model.

The representatives of the RDA Organisational and Affiliate members constitute the Organisational Assembly (OA), i.e., the committee of the whole. Now that the number of the Organisational Members has grown to exceed 40, a separate executive committee of the whole has been elected, the Organisational Advisory Board. The Organisational Advisory Board (OAB) provides organisational advice to the RDA Council. The OA and the OAB are charged with a number of responsibilities, as detailed below. With support from the Secretariat, the OAB is responsible for the development and maintenance of the RDA Organisational and Process Plan document. The chair of the OAB serves as an ex-officio member in the RDA Council.

## Organisational Assembly Members critical to the success of RDA

RDA is a lean, stakeholder driven organisation that creates the context for multi-lateral and multi-vertical collaboration. Everyone will benefit from a global mechanism for research data exchange. No one research group; no one discipline; no one country can create it. RDA provides a framework through which interest groups, working groups, and forums lever the work of many in the service of a common vision for the free and effective movement of research data. People and organisations that engage through RDA will build the global exchange systems for research data.

The global exchange system for research data will not suddenly appear. It will be built component by component by the working groups of RDA. RDA’s methodology is to realize the vision through working groups that address components in 12 to 18-month projects that allow for regular statements of *“Well that’s done! What’s next? Let’s get on with it.”*

Organisations, data initiatives will be instrumental in developing and implementing global exchange systems. Organisational members of RDA will be seen as pioneers in realizing full value from research data; they will exercise considerable influence in the development of standards for data exchange and will provide valuable insights to the entire range of RDA activity. RDA’s organisational members will be regularly briefed on developments in data interoperability and will have equally regular opportunity to provide feedback on activity and suggestions on next steps.

See the list of the current [Organisational and Affiliate Members](https://rd-alliance.org/organisation/rda-organisation-affiliate-members.html).

## Organisational Assembly (OA) and Organisational Advisory Board (OAB)

All organisations that become RDA organisational members join the Organisational Assembly, i.e. the body where all organisational members participate. The Organisational Advisory Board is a sub-committee of the whole OA, which acts as an executive committee representing the interests of the organisational members. The OAB represents the interests of organisational members and ensure that their input and needs play a role in guiding the programs and activities of the RDA. The OAB meets monthly by teleconference and in-person at the bi-annual (i.e. twice per year) RDA plenaries to provide guidance on RDA business operations, oversight of Interest Groups (IG) and Working Groups (WG), and outreach to the larger community.  Specifically, the OAB is charged with coordinating the following, in association with OA members:

1. Providing organisational and operations advice either at the request of the Secretary General or the RDA Council or to express issues raised among the organisational membership with regard to the directions, processes, and mechanisms of RDA to the Secretary General and/or Council.
2. Providing input to the Secretary General and the Secretariat on organisational needs; for example, with the goal of encouraging the formation of Interest Groups or Working Groups or other actions that could be taken by RDA to meet organisational needs.
3. Interacting with the Technical Advisory Board (TAB) during the review of IG and WG proposals to provide guidance on overlap and synergies with other RDA and community efforts.
4. Collaborating with the TAB to review mid-point and final Working Group products and to advise on how implementable proposed product is likely to be. OAB provides guidance on organisational needs and partnership and pilot opportunities, with the goal of encouraging broad community adoption of RDA products.
5. Assisting with Plenary programming and other outreach activities.
6. Developing of test-beds to support WG pilot projects and distribution of products to the community.
7. Encouraging and facilitating the adoption of relevant RDA “products” among organisational members to drive broad adoption.

## Membership Benefits

* Being seen to act as early adopters for newly developed standards and protocols
* Adding influence to their work on data interoperability in their sectors, markets and geographies
* Having a voice inside RDA, providing advice on the needs of their sectors and the problems faced in data exchange
* Providing advice to the RDA Council through the Organisational Advisory Board
* Access on a regular basis to publication of RDA Foundation budget and financial status;
* Regular and meaningful briefings from Council
* Being recognised on the RDA Website and at RDA Meetings as a leader in world data sharing and interoperability
* Receiving regular briefings on the progress of RDA’s work
* Be able to participate in the 6-monthly Organisational Assembly that takes place at RDA Plenaries interacting with other Organisational Members (OMs)

# Value and Engagement

These topics are clearly linked: the more value organizations (and individuals) feel that they get, the more likely they are to engage more deeply (and vice versa). However, there are limits: as stated above, it is probably unrealistic to expect organizations to commit significant (fractions of) significant numbers of staff. Whatever is committed must match the responsibilities of the organizations involved and any constraints that may arise from their funding models.

That being said, this significant pool of knowledge and experience – both at the individual as well as at the organizational level – is probably not being optimally exploited. One can hope for perhaps a factor in improvement, but not an order of magnitude, given the constraints highlighted above.

# What (more) Could Organizations Do?

Obvious examples include hosting[[3]](#footnote-3) of meetings outside the main plenaries. This could have a double advantage: a (semi-)public seminar could be included in each such meeting, helping to bring the “RDA message” to a much wider audience.

Given the ever growing number of organizational members, there should be no shortage of finding institutes that are willing to host such meetings for several / many years to come (some transparency in how the host is selected would be appreciated). Some acknowledgement is probably necessary, but this may be as little as a mention in a regular RDA newsletter.

Other suggestions include the following:

* (Organisational members may) Promote their adoption of RDA Recommendations;
* Tout their membership on their website and other places;
* Engage their stakeholders (funders, clients, users, etc.) in RDA.

# What More Could Organizations Want?

The main issues concern lack of information, transparency, and clear communication channels and processes.

Things that would help (see updated membership benefits above):

* Publication of RDA Foundation budget and financial status (This will start shortly for 2015 and will continue quarterly, with a narrative report bi-annually);
* Regular and meaningful briefings from Council;
* A regular newsletter highlighting Recommendations and other outputs (presumably to all RDA).
* Comprehensive notification of RDA and RDA chapter sponsored events
* In-person plenary-based OA meetings that are structured to be open to input from the attending representatives

# Recommendations for OA Members

The following recommendations suggest to OA members they could maximize their return on investment in the RDA.

* Compare current RDA WGs/IGs against the near term strategies of the Organisation’s projects and sponsors, then strategically place a few staff in the relevant groups to ensure the Organisations interests were being served;
* Where appropriate, work to initiate or chair groups of particular interest;
* Use the Organisation’s voice on the OA to advocate that the overall RDA organisation continue to move in a strategic direction relevant to the Organisation concerned;
* Use RDA to amplify the message the Organisation is trying to bring to its stakeholders (i.e. Funding agencies), by showing that other organisations are aligned with it on key issues;
* Urge my stakeholders to support RDA directly, because it brings value to the Organisation and others beyond the small contributions of the agencies;
* Encourage staff to include budgeting for participation in RDA as part of their funding proposals.

# Summary

RDA members and member organizations already represent a vast pool of expert knowledge and commitment.

Exploiting this in a mutually beneficial way should be a priority for 2016 and beyond.

# OAB V&A Group Membership

* Group members: Jamie Shiers-EIROForum (Chair), Mark Parsons (RDA SG), Amy Nurnberger, [Cynthia Hudson Vitale](https://rd-alliance.org/users/chudson), [Colin Elman](https://rd-alliance.org/users/colinelman),[Robert Quick,](https://rd-alliance.org/users/rquick)[Fabrizio Gagliardi,](https://rd-alliance.org/users/fabriziogagliardi)[Kevin Ashley,](https://rd-alliance.org/users/kashley)Malcolm Wolski, [Leif Laaksonen,](https://rd-alliance.org/users/leiflaaksonen)Nick Jones
* Working area created: [https://rd-alliance.org/groups/value-and-engagement-organisational-members.html.](https://rd-alliance.org/groups/value-and-engagement-organisational-members.html)
* Mailing list: value-engagement-oa@rda-groups.org.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | e-mail | Organisation |
| Jamie SHIERS | Jamie.Shiers@cern.ch | EIROForum IT WG |
| Mark Parson | parsom3@rpi.edu | RDA SG no less |
| Amy Nurnberger | anurnberger@columbia.edu | Columbia University Libraries/Information Services |
| Cynthia Hudson Vitale | chudson@wustl.edu | Washington University in St. Louis |
| Colin Elman | celman@maxwell.syr.edu | ? |
| Rob Quick | rquick@iupui.edu | Indiana University |
| Fabrizio Gagliardi | FabrizioGagliardi@hotmail.com | Barcelona Supercomputer Centre |
| Kevin Ashley | kevin.ashley@ed.ac.uk | DCC Director  |
| Malcolm Wolski | m.wolski@griffith.edu.au | Director - eResearch Services, Brisbane |
| Leif Laaksonen | leif.laaksonen@csc.fi | CSC - IT Center for Science Ltd |
| Nick Jones | n.jones@auckland.ac.nz | New Zealand eScience Infrastructure |

Table 1 - Members of the V&E Sub-Group

1. See <https://rd-alliance.org/members> for the current status and details. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In case of the EIROForum IT WG, this happens twice a year. Reports are also made to the WLCG management bodies, addressing many more organisations than the EIROForum’s 8 members. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For which a registration fee may apply and/or costs, such as food, lodging and transport being explicitly at the expense of the attendees. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)