

## HEALTH RESEARCH ALLIANCE –2016 STRATEGIC PLAN

### MISSION

The Health Research Alliance (HRA), a collaborative member organization of nonprofit research funders, is committed to maximizing the impact of biomedical research to improve human health.

#### To achieve this mission, HRA:

- Fosters open communication and collaboration among and between funders and the broader research community
- Collects and shares comprehensive data and analysis about nonprofit funding for biomedical research and training
- Provides leadership, knowledge, tools, and opportunities to promote innovative and effective grantmaking
- Addresses issues that are key to accelerating research discovery and its translation

#### Core Values:

- Impact: We enable each organization individually and the research community collectively to enhance the effectiveness of biomedical research.
- Collaborate: We openly communicate, share information, experience and knowledge, and work together as partners to achieve our shared goals.
- Innovate: We foster novel approaches to address challenges in biomedical research.

### ORGANIZATION

HRA is a membership organization composed of nonprofit funders of biomedical research and training. Organizations participating in HRA represent a variety of types of nonprofit funders of biomedical research, including voluntary health agencies, private foundations, and operating foundations. All of these organizations share a common interest in speeding the translation of biomedical science into applications that improve health and in identifying and adopting effective practices in funding health research. HRA was incorporated in November 2005 and is tax exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code as a 509(a)(2) public charity.

### CONTEXT FOR THE NEW PLAN

This plan lays out recommendations for HRA for the next 3 years and builds on the significant accomplishments since the last strategic plan in 2010. Since then, HRA has

- Grown membership from 42 to 75 organizations that support biomedical research
- Collected grant information from member organizations, published a full-length paper on nonprofit support for biomedical research in 2012, and distributed an infographic in 2014
- Grown activities such as Members' Meetings, interest groups, and initiatives to address emerging issues in biomedical research and grantmaking
- Launched a Public Access Initiative
- Partnered with external organizations to start discussions and catalyze actions that impact issues critical to the biomedical research community

At this time, HRA stands ready to not only deepen the value of membership but to also expand our engagement and leadership with the greater research community. This new plan reflects the goal to be both internal and external in impact.

## PROCESS

To generate recommendations for the next 3 years, a strategic planning committee, made up of HRA membership and HRA staff, was established in January 2016 (see Appendix 1) and a survey was completed by members to obtain feedback on where we are and where we should go (see [www.healthra.org/survey](http://www.healthra.org/survey) for complete results). Committee members then analyzed the survey results to identify goals valued by the membership, all the while keeping in mind the balance of internal and external impact. In addition, this plan was informed by feedback received from the leadership of the various interest groups and subcommittees. The plan of action that follows is the result of this analysis and discussion.

## SUMMARY

The new strategic plan was developed under two driving forces:

- To deepen the value of membership
- To expand our engagement with the greater research community

The strategic plan has the following elements:

### ***Communicate and collaborate***

- Continue to hold our highly interactive Members' Meetings and add occasional public meetings that engage other constituents to learn from each other.
- Improve our use of communication tools such as the listserv, website, e-newsletters, infographics, and social media to share critical information about grantmaking practices and advances in biomedical research with members and the broader research world.
- Work on increasing the organizational diversity of our membership so that we bring together a range of nonprofits to collaborate.

### ***Collect and share information about nonprofit funding of biomedical research***

- Improve the functionality of our grants database.
- Work on providing public access to unrestricted fields and increasing representation in the grants database.
- Produce reports each year that bring nonprofit funding into the light.

### ***Provide the support needed to promote effective grantmaking***

- Reorganize interest and working groups so that they generate practical guidance and tools and reach a large audience within HRA and externally.
- Offer thought-provoking webinars that address challenges faced by our members.

### ***Address issues in basic discovery and translational research***

- Create opportunities for HRA representation at the table when experts are convened to discuss emerging issues.
- Disseminate knowledge gained at convenings to both internal and external constituents.

## PLAN OF ACTION

### Members' Meetings

The Members' Meetings are valued very highly and are considered extremely effective. The semiannual Members' Meetings are the principal venue by which HRA members interact, learn, network, and collaborate, and are especially valuable in enabling deep exploration of important issues in basic discovery and translational research. The recent Members' Meeting Task Force sampled HRA's membership and concluded that no changes were recommended for the Members' Meeting frequency, duration, and format. The Task Force recommended developing a process to allow member organizations to have additional staff attend meetings (with appropriate fees) provided space is available.

Beyond the current meeting structure, however, there are clear opportunities to add value to HRA's meetings, to explore new approaches to benefit specific constituencies within HRA's membership and to broaden HRA's reach externally. To that end, we recommend:

- Convening as appropriate public meetings or sessions within other public meetings (for example, the annual BIO conference) to promote HRA's external visibility and impact.
- Developing a process to invite guests to our meetings for the purposes of recruiting new members or learning from organizations that are not currently members of HRA.

Progress will be measured by:

- Satisfaction of attendees at Members' Meetings.
- Successful completion of one public meeting.

### Internal and External Communication

HRA is engaged in a broad range of activities, with participation from many different representatives of its members, as well as external organizations and individuals. While these efforts are highlighted at Members Meetings and in periodic communications to members, there currently is no specific communications plan to inform internal and external audiences about HRA's work. The goals of such a plan would be multi-faceted: to regularly inform members and external audiences about HRA activities and initiatives; increase engagement of both HRA member organizations and nonmember stakeholders, increase engagement with key leadership and executives especially of HRA member organizations; demonstrate the value of HRA membership; inform the broader community about HRA and its specific initiatives; and recruit new members. It is recommended that an HRA communications plan include the following:

- Quarterly or bi-annual e-newsletter to members about current HRA activities. These could include brief updates on initiatives, highlights from the Member's meetings, items of interest available on the website, information on upcoming meetings, webinars, and other activities and other information of interest to the membership.
- Annual infographic providing data and analysis from the HRA grants database for both internal and external constituents (including senior leadership in HRA member organizations and external thought leaders).
- Annual updates on HRA progress and impact distributed to HRA member representatives and external leaders in the biomedical research community.
- Targeted outreach to the leaders of HRA member organizations and external stakeholders about HRA accomplishments and activities.

- Reconfiguration of the HRA website and regular updates of information and resources on the site.

The HRA Website in its current format contains a great deal of information behind the password protected member's only section. Members report that navigating these pages is difficult, and, therefore, at a minimum organizing the content to where it is easier to find and less text heavy would be beneficial. Feedback from the membership also indicated that the website could be a powerful conduit to promote the presence of HRA to the outside world and a means of engaging the broader biomedical community. It is recommended that a task force form to address both the layout and content of the webpage deciding on the most cost effective way to move forward, as well as review how much of the members only content should be made available on the publicly accessible pages.

- Effective use of an electronic forum.

HRA Members rated the current listserv as one of the most valuable of all HRA activities. It is therefore recommended that HRA continue to support an electronic system for exchanging messages. In order to enhance this valuable service and provide HRA membership with greater flexibility to filter or highlight information on subjects of greatest individual interest, a number of solutions should be explored. These solutions include, but are not limited to:

- A collaboration tool like SLACK (or Yammer, Trellis, etc.) that allows an overall Team, which would be the entirety of the HRA membership. Then establish specific subtopics/tasks (for example: disease-specific posts, News, Funding Opportunities, Job Postings, etc) under the main Team communication channel to allow members to subscribe to receive all postings, or certain classes of postings, or browse and search for individual posts within a subtopic.
- The current Listserv that allows keyword sorting so members can choose which subjects they wish to see by using keywords
- Further investigation into potential solutions and membership wishes on the flexibility they would like to have in choosing topics needs to be conducted.

- Possible use of social media

To advise and assist in this effort, it is recommended that a Communications Advisory Committee be established, which includes communications experts from HRA members.

Progress will be measured by:

- Establishment of a Communications Advisory Committee
- Development and implementation of a communication plan within the next year
- Piloting a new electronic forum, or substantive changes to the existing electronic forum, within three months of ratifying the strategic plan
- Increase in traffic on website from member organizations and non-members

## Membership

HRA should work to engage diverse member organizations. HRA's standing Membership Committee should continue to review potential new member organizations and work to ensure that HRA has a diverse membership that reflects the range of non-profit sizes and missions, as well as biomedical research foci and approaches. Additional viewpoints and experiences not represented by the typical HRA member organization could be important in developing innovative solutions to some of the daunting challenges that the biomedical research community will confront.

## HRA Grants Database

The HRA grants database (currently called “gHRAsp” or grants in the HRA shared portfolio), is a defining accomplishment of HRA. No other organization has attempted to provide detailed, current information about the scope and nature of funding by the non-profit community. HRA members have demonstrated a consistent strong commitment to developing and enhancing gHRAsp including dedicating significant resources to ensure its success.

Based on a special survey conducted about the database, it is clear that the membership continues to see the importance of collecting and analyzing data about the funding of biomedical research by the non-profit sector, as well as the broad sharing of this information. The database has significant value to both the biomedical research enterprise as a whole, as well as individual organizations, as follows:

Value to the overall biomedical research enterprise:

- Provides concrete information on the size and scope of funding by non-profits
- Enables landscape, trend and gap analyses
- Fosters transparency
- Enables more effective grant making by existing and new organizations
- Demonstrates the important role of non-profits in the overall enterprise

Value to individual grant making organizations:

- Portfolio and impact analyses
- Identification of potential new program areas
- Tracking of grantees
- Reviewer identification
- Identifying duplicative funding or scientific overlap

However, the current database (gHRAsp) has significant limitations, such as a difficult and time consuming process for uploading data from organizations to the database, both unnecessary and missing data fields, difficulty cleaning and disambiguating the data, and difficulty analyzing the data.

To enhance the functionality and value of the HRA database, the following steps are recommended:

1. Transition to a new database platform: A new platform for the database is needed to enable easier downloading of data and more robust analyses.
2. Public Accessibility: Given the important role of non-profit funders and the value of the data, as well as principles of openness and transparency, some or all of the data will be made publically accessible. HRA will work with the members to determine procedures for sharing these data.
3. Comprehensiveness of the data: To fully capture the size and scope of funding by the non-profit sector, the goal is to have the database represent as large a segment of the non-profit community as possible. Different models of participation by non-HRA members will need to be considered.
4. Feasibility: The cost and staffing needs for this initiative will need to be considered and external funding may be sought given the value this would provide to the biomedical research enterprise.

Progress will be measured by:

- Smooth transition to a new platform with greater functionality
- Greater use by members
- Public access to some data fields
- Reports issued annually
- Greater awareness about the database and HRA

## Interest/Working Groups

Several mechanisms (interest groups, working groups, task forces, etc.) have been used to bring subsets of the HRA membership together to tackle common problems and develop solutions. HRA membership rated these groups successful, and they have led to several of HRA's initiatives. Given the diversity of members' interests, resources and needs, the structure of these groups must be flexible enough to fit both short-term and long-term goals, and support development of a variety of resources or products, while not unreasonably taxing HRA's resources. Therefore, we recommend that HRA continues to support groups or create new groups that meet three basic requirements:

1. Focus on area(s) of interest that align with the mission of HRA.
2. Have enough shared interest so that at least 15% of member organizations participate in or plan to participate in the group.
3. Set clearly defined annual goals, such as developing a resource or product, or providing information on a specific area of interest.

For those groups (which can be interest groups, working groups or task forces) that meet the above requirements, there should also be a requirement for accountability and transparency.

- The groups should be recognized on the public HRA website along with their goals, strategies, and resources developed.
- The Members' only pages should have an up-to-date list of the group's membership and leadership, and a link to ongoing or archived forums or online discussions (and any resources/products which will not be shared with the external community).
- The orientation for new members must include an introduction to these groups and all member organizations are encouraged (even expected) to have staff actively participate in groups relevant to their organization.
- Groups will be required to periodically update the board on progress, and will be asked to report on progress during the HRA update session at the Members' Meeting. Groups will also be expected to revisit progress toward the groups' goals annually.
- Resources developed will be shared with the membership and the external community via the website. Other communication platforms will also be used to disseminate these resources - increasing visibility and traffic to the HRA website.
- Groups will be encouraged to use the Members' Meetings (with both current and ideally new participants) to host breakout sessions on topics of interest. Revisiting the groups' goals and discussing resources to be developed can be another effective use of breakout sessions.
- Groups are also encouraged to have membership on the Program Committee to help develop sessions.

Driven by the needs and interests of the HRA membership, these groups currently include:

- The FIRST Group (Funder-Institution Relations Task Group): Focused on enhancing relationships with academic institutions
- The Early Career Scientist Interest Group: Focused on the sustainability of the biomedical workforce and other issues relevant to early career scientists and career development
- Drug and Other Therapy Development Interest Group: Focused on accelerating the development of novel therapies
- Open Science Task Force: Tackling issues such as preprint servers, open access to publications and data, and improving research reproducibility
- The Grants Administration Interest Group: Delving into operational issues with respect to funding research

- The HRA-FDA New Frontiers in Science Distinguished Lectureship Program: Aims to strengthen scientific expertise at the FDA and to foster interactions between the scientific community and the FDA

New groups may also be formed (a potential new groups might be focused on evaluation, for example) as long as they meet the eligibility and accountability requirements. In addition, working groups that are not meeting the three requirements defined above should be eliminated. For example, since the Discovery Science working group no longer satisfies the eligibility requirements, it is recommended that it be eliminated. Current and newly created groups will also be expected to seek feedback from the appropriate external and internal stakeholders as to the relevance of each group's goals and potential resources, and to seek out valuable opportunities for synergy or partnership.

Progress will be measured by:

- Establishment and achievement of annual goals by each group
- Demonstrated value added for HRA members or the broader scientific community by each group
- Broad engagement of HRA members in the groups
- Effective communication of the activities of each group to the HRA membership and larger community

## Webinars

HRA members have found value in webinars on topics of interest. Currently, webinars are driven by the Interest Groups, with some more active than others. Topics often come up at Members Meetings, on the Listserv and elsewhere that would be valuable webinars, but do not fit within the subject matter of any Interest Group. Therefore, to provide regular webinars on topics of interest, it is recommended that HRA establish a Webinar Committee, modeled after the Program Committee that would set a schedule for webinars, identify topics of interest, arrange for moderators and speakers, and suggest ways to maximize utility. Topics could come from issues raised at Members Meetings, suggestions by Interest/Working Groups, or come from the membership, but the format would be flexible to accommodate the topic and members' interest. The Committee should also consider the pros and cons of opening up webinars to those who are not members of HRA.

Progress will be measured by:

- Establishment of a committee that meets regularly
- Substantial participation in several webinars per year
- Dissemination of top take-away messages from each webinar
- Application and use of this information by members and potentially the broader community

## External Role and Engagement

To understand issues and challenges across the entire spectrum of biomedical research and explore ways in which HRA and HRA members can impact these issues, it is important that HRA be actively engaged with the external biomedical research community and thought leaders addressing these issues. Therefore, HRA will focus on:

- Being at the table (HRA staff and/or member representatives) when experts are convened to discuss issues of importance to HRA and its members. Recommendations for important meetings to attend could come from HRA staff and members.

1/5/2017

- Sharing knowledge, ideas and recommendations from these meetings with the HRA membership for their information and further action by HRA and/or its members. Knowledge will also be shared with external constituents when relevant.

Progress will be measured by:

- Dissemination of top take-aways from these meetings, including recommendations for next steps and potential actions by HRA and its members.
- Implementation and outcomes/impact of these next steps.