



Health Research Alliance: Strategic Planning Report of Recommendations

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Welcome

Introduction & Process Overview

From August 2020 to November 2020, verynice engaged with the Health Research Alliance in an effort to facilitate the organization's strategic planning process. The process began with a kick-off strategy session with the Strategic Planning Committee to establish the goals for the strategic planning initiative, while also understanding the current state of the organization and finalizing the project plan as a whole. Following the kickoff meeting, our research took three unique forms:

Stakeholder Analysis: We conducted a series of 17 individual interviews, and 3 group interviews with a diverse representation of HRA's community. This community included existing members, potential members, and former members of the organization. In addition to the interviews, we designed and administered a survey for the wider HRA community, collecting over 100 responses.

Environmental Scan: To supplement the more immediate nature of the stakeholder interviews and survey, we also conducted desk research and held conversations with industry experts to determine 10 key signals of change and three possible future scenarios for the organization.

Strategic Planning Intensive: Finally, we held a strategic planning intensive workshop session over the course of three hours with 30 participants from the HRA community. The session explored both the potential collapse and success of the organization, and also included a facilitated vision statement exercise.

The following report includes documentation and key insights from the above research modalities, and also includes a series of key recommendations for the Strategic Planning Committee to consider and leverage in the next phase of the strategic planning process for HRA.

Key Strategic Recommendations

Overall Key Insights

The following are key themes and insights that ran throughout all aspects of the research process. These serve as recommendations for the Strategic Planning Committee to consider further in the next steps of the strategic planning process.

Unconventional Growth: More members, more money, more programs, more impact. The conventional definition of success for any organization is “growth”, or year-over-year increase in output. However, based on our key findings, “growth” for HRA may be of the unconventional sorts. First, there are a finite number of organizations that align with the profile of an HRA membership organization. Second, traditional growth might not be that attractive to current members. While growth in national membership can be one impact metric, we are suggesting looking at and beyond this in the years to come.

Identify all national organizations that align with the ideal membership profile. Complete an outreach initiative to reach all organizations in 2021. Convert 25% of qualified leads to increase membership by 2025.

Expand upon the current stakeholder “verticals” to further segment the existing and potential membership in 2021. Keep the size of your events small, or have breakout groups most of the time. Pilot an “intimate event” for a more specific segment in 2021/2022. Compare event feedback/survey for the intimate event option with the traditional meetings and gatherings.

Consider international membership opportunities. Metric for success: Identify an international organization that can serve as an “anchor” member and partner in advocacy of the benefits of HRA by 2025.

Consider additional revenue models to support the organization beyond membership dues. These may derive from public facing content and initiatives as well as professional development initiatives. Consider unbundling your services to have lower-cost offerings (for smaller orgs with lower budgets), or partnering with organizations that have complementary/overlapping offerings to get several memberships at one price (so larger orgs can have one membership fee to pay and defend, instead of a ‘constellation’ of dues and the need to defend each one individually). Pilot these models throughout 2021-2025 to assess what new model may be implemented more permanently in 2025 and beyond.

Become the go-to. Consider non-member benefits and content for external parties. A common theme in the workshop discussion was a desire for HRA to be recognized as a thought leader and as an influencer on national policy. To accomplish this, develop public-facing content that gets in front of policymakers. Set one stretch goal around how science “gets done” in the US – perhaps around the IP process, reducing bias in research

and/or funding - and garner the enormous collective influence of your members to push that goal forward as one united front. Getting a single win in the policy arena by 2025 will create excitement, momentum, and an expanded sense of possibility

Resilience: For historical purposes, it's worth noting that the organization's strategic planning process is happening during one of the most uncertain times in global history... a pandemic with no end in sight, ongoing civil unrest, and a highly contentious political election has certainly influenced respondent inclinations. One of these inclinations that is worth considering in our post-Normal reality is "resilience".

As Tom Attlee says, "things are getting better and better, and worse and worse, faster and faster". HRA should incorporate more frequent feedback and review processes in its next strategic plan to ensure that any programs, initiatives, or goals that are set remain realistic and of the utmost importance.

Further, to build on the organization's commitment to transparency, these review and feedback loops may benefit from taking place in an open forum/town hall format with members.

Implement consistent feedback with members that extend beyond traditional surveys to supplement the experience of filling out a form with more dynamic and relationship driven engagements. Impact metric: number of town halls, collaborative work sessions, etc held with members and the HRA community that are focused on HRA itself.

Schedule regular high-level strategy meetings with a Strategic Planning Committee from 2021-2025, and treat the finalized strategic plan as a living document. Impact metric: number of iterations over the five year period, to the strategic plan.

Conduct a relevance survey each year to better understand the organization's ability to be relevant to its membership, but pertaining specifically to the current global context.

Professional Development: HRA has a unique opportunity to be a catalyst for major DEI leadership shifts in the medical research industry while also addressing bias in research. And the best way to lead is from within. Work to create a more representative leadership within HRA and its working groups as well.

Launch a mentorship program for underrepresented groups in the medical research community.

Establish a scholarship for underrepresented groups in the medical research community.

Create a professional development curriculum and conceptualize a pilot by 2022, roll out the program in 2023, and assess the impact of the professional development program in 2024 for iteration in 2025.

Achieve gender balance, and grow BIPOC representation for all working groups, and working group leadership.

Focus & Structure: As the membership business model grows in the nonprofit sector, HRA may see new competition leading to “membership fatigue” for the current community. To best mitigate this, work to eliminate any offerings that can be obtained by similar organizations to focus on what HRA does best. Focus membership marketing and sales on driving home this unique point of differentiation to retain and attract members.

Do less, go deeper. There are dozens of areas of focus for HRA, which can cause lack of awareness and inability to justify dues to members who don’t hold the purse strings. As mentioned above, consider bundling services with other nonprofits with complementary offerings, or creating partial memberships at lower price points.

Continuously audit the various programs and initiatives that HRA is involved in, and do not be afraid to eliminate programs and initiatives that are making less of an impact, or that are more similar to the offerings of other organizations. Focus on the initiatives that require few resources and create high impact (e.g. listserv).

Create structure and accountability for working groups, including metrics for success that can be reviewed annually. Do not be afraid to eliminate working groups that are not performing well, or contributing to the key value proposition of the organization.

Through the workshop, one consistent area of focus to invest in is the creation of principles and guidelines for biomedical funding, as well as the investment in communication initiatives to elevate the status and awareness of HRA’s voice.

To synthesize the above points, we recommend taking a *kaizen* approach: create processes that lead to gradual, continuous improvement of operations and value propositions where everyone who is involved with HRA is responsible for its success. Working group chairs and members can be responsible for measuring the impact of their working group, suggesting improvements, and eliminating waste. This will let HRA be resilient and agile through what is sure to be a constantly changing next 5 years.

Stakeholder Analysis

Introduction & Process Overview

Throughout September 2020, we conducted interviews and administered surveys to guide our research. Our interviews consisted of 17 individual interviews (45 minutes each), and 3 group interviews (60 minutes each). In addition, our survey included 108 respondents, with 101 members and 7 non-members. The surveys included a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research process was oriented towards two key research questions:

1. What value do people and organizations get from HRA that drives them to sign up, pay dues, and actively engage with the community?
2. What does HRA do (or what could they be doing) to maximize impact around goals?

Our process focused on eight areas where HRA provides value: resources, activities, networking, reach ("deepen the bench"), community, member experience, organizational health, and diversifying revenue streams. A breakdown of each area of interest, with subcategorization we referenced, is included below.

Resources

- Awareness, access, utility, etc
- Recommendations and guidelines from NIH, NASEM, and others
- Lessons learned from fellow HRA members
- Website as a resource repository
- HRA Analyzer - awardee database
- HRA Open - facilitates Open Access policies

Activities

- Member meetings, awareness of events etc
- Working Group meetings and breakout sessions
- Regional in person meetings
- Listserv discussions
- Webinars to introduce topics and resources (protocols.io, independent IRB, online peer review training to reduce bias, GMS and evaluation vendors, etc.)

Networking

- What's working? How have members made meaningful connections?
- Members Meetings and Regional meetings (in person)
- Collaborative Workshops (in person)
- Engagement in working groups - shared interests brings people together
- Listserv
- Virtual networking events (e.g. HRA's Book club)

Reach (“deepen the bench”)

- Provide value to more members, or more individuals within each organization
- How big do we need (or want) to be?
- Are we missing organizations who could help us achieve HRA’s mission?
- Do we need to partner with other stakeholders to help us achieve our mission?
(Researchers? Research Institutions? NIH/NSF/NASEM? Science Philanthropy Alliance?
FasterCures? etc)

Community

- Define Community
- What kind do we / our members want?
- Can HRA membership add value to organizations by serving as a “professional society” to staff at member organizations?

Member Experience

- What gets in the way of members engaging further?
- How can we engage members who have different amounts of time/energy they can put toward HRA (2 hr/quarter vs 2 hrs/week)

Organizational Health

- Creative collaboration
- Bringing people together for collective impact

Diversifying Revenue streams

- E.g. cushioning for lean times

Key Insights: Strengths & Opportunities

The following highlights a series of seven key strengths and opportunities. Each item includes a headline overview, supporting survey data, and supporting quotes from our interviews.

- 1. Resources**
- 2. Meetings**
- 3. Working Groups**
- 4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
- 5. Fundraising & Grantmaking**
- 6. External Opportunities/Expanding Reach**
- 7. HRA Reporter/Analyser/Open**

Resources

HRA is a strong hub of resources and minds, but its breadth makes it difficult to organize, focus, and streamline access to/communication about these resources.

Some of HRA's offerings are used by nearly everyone...

- 88% of member respondents read the newsletters and use HRA resources
- 93% of member cite "learning from colleagues via listserv and other venues" as a reason they engage with HRA

Tapping into a broad group of individuals is extremely useful to members...

- "[I get the most value from] using the hivemind - asking questions and getting answers and opinions from a variety of different funders"

There is an overwhelming amount of information...

- "I don't use 99% of the listserv emails - and sometimes get over 30 of them per day" (*Note: this person still subscribes and find it useful*)
- "Unaware of many things that are already out there. I have all I can handle so not looking for more!"

Useful information could be easier to use and search...

- 86% use the listserv, but only 22% use the listserv archives
- "Only the last couple of years of content is available to search on listserv - would like a full archive to be available"
- "Help us find which members are in the community of fundraising professionals, and others - hard to tell from Listserv... a member contact directory could help" (*Note: this person is unaware of the member directory, reflecting a larger issue of awareness*)
- "There are so many resources but some are not as easy to find. Maryrose/Annette are wonderful with their knowledge of the history but it's also helpful to have a better way to look. Some are also not up to date (membership directory for example)."

This also makes it hard to communicate the value of HRA and justify dues...

- “People don't understand the value of HRA until they dive in”
- “I struggle to get my organization to approve payment for this as they are not sure of the value. I think it is worth it, but again we have a culture issue, and an impression that all money should go to fund research...HRA could help with providing a business case, maybe with case studies (of how membership has benefited other organizations)”
- “Trying to convey the value to board members when we have expensive dues - helps to show the board how listserv helps with cross-germination (bylaws, etc)”

HRA could benefit from more focus...

- “There is an opportunity and challenge to bring together HRA members around a concerted cause. HRA members are diverse: public charities versus endowed foundations, big and small, different diseases. this makes it difficult to have broad-based unified concerted efforts”

Ideas & Recommendations: Resources

Expand, segment, and/or create a more easily searchable archive of the Listserv.

The Listserv is one of HRA's biggest assets and taps into the collective wisdom of the group. The organization has made a good effort to spare peoples' inboxes by moving this to Slack, but engagement dropped off, and the Slack was abandoned. Look for ways to streamline this communication while keeping it top of mind. For example, could it be segmented? Archived? Could HRA expand the listserv to include communities outside of HRA members, perhaps at a lower price point, thereby expanding HRA's reach, creating a new revenue stream, bringing in more policymakers, the public, etc into the conversation?

Policymakers, fundraisers, and researchers need one another. You have researchers and fundraising experts - how can you add value for policymakers to make them part of the conversation, rather than an outside entity? Is there benefit in making them part of the hivemind and a symbiotic part of the HRA community via the listserv?

Share success stories

The majority of the impact that HRA provides goes unheard by a wider audience. Every time someone makes a valuable new connection, or learns something from the listserv, there is an opportunity to show HRA's value. Capture the stories and anecdotes of members, 'wins' of working groups, etc and share that across members to show how HRA benefits members and their orgs by saving money, time, introducing to valuable connections, and so on. A short story goes a long way. Consider having a “member of the month” award if you don't already, to encourage engagement with HRA, celebrate your members, and reinforce the impact HRA can have on one's career and their organizations.

Meetings

Meetings are an important aspect of HRA's value offering, and there is an opportunity to engage on a deeper level due to COVID.

Meetings are one of the most valuable things HRA offers...

- 84% of member respondents "have used [member meetings] and find them valuable"
- "I find the members meetings most valuable, as I get to connect with other funders and hear experts/perspectives on a variety of topics I wouldn't have normally considered."

Virtual meetings have upsides...

- "Going virtual means less travel cost and time commitment, and more potential attendees to meetings."
- "HRA has continued to be valuable during the COVID pandemic - I've really appreciated learning how other non-profits are responding to the current crisis."
- "I think HRA should keep at least 1 annual meeting as virtual even after COVID, as this reduces travel expenses and allows others at my organization to learn best practices"

And downsides...

- "For better and worse, virtual attendance (1) lacks the same type of networking and (b) enables me to skip sessions and fool myself into thinking I will watch them later"
- "I miss the in person round tables at member meetings during breakfast and lunch"

Remember to manage the headcount...

- "Need to establish appropriate group size for virtual setting; 20-30 people is too many; can something be done with more specialized, smaller group breakout sessions?"
- "Negative: Larger groups, challenging to make connections."

And keep going with the CEO Forum...

- "Good to meet other CEOs from a broader spectrum than just cancer organizations"

Ideas & Recommendations: Meetings

Start Doing Mastermind Groups

Collaboration and knowledge-sharing are a big part of meetings, and HRA membership as a whole. You might try using a "Mastermind" structure as a way to get all attendees engaged as participants. It could look something like this:

- Set 60 minutes where three members orgs come with a problem/challenge they are facing. Other organizations can be represented as well, to contribute feedback.
- Each group gets 20 minutes (3 to introduce the problem, 3 to answer questions, and 14 to hear input from the other orgs. This input could be ideas for introductions, steering them toward valuable resources, saying how they've solved a similar problem in the past, etc.
- When the 20 minutes are up, move onto the next org

This is a quick, personal, highly facilitated way to tap into an intimate group and have all orgs walk away with actionable ideas. Going deep, fast. Our research showed an opportunity for small orgs to learn from bigger ones, and vice versa. Invite a mix of small and large orgs to contribute. Other orgs can participate by sharing ideas and get value by hearing how others are solving problems they may be facing as well.

Use technology

Experiment with tools like Remo (<https://remo.co>) to re-create the in-person experience.

Use

“virtual” to your benefit.

Working Groups

Working groups have potential for great impact, but they can be resource-intensive and time consuming.

Working groups are useful, but take time...

- “I have a limited amount of hours that I can bill to things like HRA and professional development.”

And sometimes these working groups don’t make headway...

- “We’ve been talking about the same issues for years”

The output of these working groups should be as visible as possible...

- “Concrete Ideas that can be translated into action for scientific programs, disseminate that info, and make sure its value is visible”
- “I greatly appreciate it when these groups share their findings or the resources they develop because they are usually of high quality and value.”

Ideas & Recommendations: Working Groups

Treat Working Group Meetings As Sacred

Working groups are an opportunity to make real progress on important issues. To that end, working group meetings should include a clear agenda, goals, and accountability structures in place. Since many co-chairs may not have strong experience in project management, consider assigning an accountability lead to track progress and serve as moderator for the group.

Try creating a “charter” of best practices for working groups to make sure value is being created, people are coming prepared, and avoid burning through time. This could remove the guesswork for working group chairs, and make everything run more smoothly. If any groups are not meeting these requirements, respectfully suggest they close the group and allocate that time elsewhere with more focus and impact. Have a method for evaluating whether each group should “pivot, persevere, or abandon.” Have a method for sharing their progress more widely with the HRA community.

“Learning” vs “Doing” Agendas

This suggestion is copied verbatim from one person’s response to the survey question, “What resource(s) should HRA offer to its members, but doesn’t?”

- “I think it would be helpful for each of the working groups to have learning agendas (in addition to “doing” agendas) to bring in members that are interested in learning more about topics but not close enough to participate. This learning agenda could be shaped by twice annual (or quarterly) webinars where experts on the working group topics present what they’re doing (in a low-pressure way). I think this would be especially helpful if the working group is looking to recruit members or trying to bring the rest of HRA up to speed on the topic. I don’t think that HRA doesn’t do this - but maybe offering some type of common framework (within the working group charters) around a learning agenda would be helpful?”

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

There is a lot of interest in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, but systemic issues take time and effort to fix.

There was a lot of energy around DEI in the open-ended questions on the survey...

- “Evolving questions about diversity, equity and inclusion are very timely and promising.”
- “[HRA should] address issues hindering scientific discovery including diversity and health disparities challenges. I think these are important enough to call out specifically.”

When asked what is missing from HRA’s current goals, some responses were...

- “I think the DEI conversation is so important and think that some of the ideas from the last DEI call are important to follow up on. Helping highlight specific examples and emerging best practices, where possible, could be very helpful.”
- “Recognizing and addressing systemic biases and that impact the outcomes of research, such as racism and sexism”

There are ways to use the HRA community's collective will to address this

- “Unite for common goals, for example all collectively including clauses about diversity and inclusion, and data sharing in their grant agreements.”

Ideas & Recommendations: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

- Create a DEI mentorship program to create more diversity “at the top” of health research orgs (shorter term goal)
- Agree as a collective to include DEI clauses in grant agreements
- Aim to influence policy around bias in research and funding (longer-term goal)

Fundraising & Grantmaking

HRA and its community has a lot of knowledge and experience around fundraising, but can find new ways to drive science forward outside of traditional models.

Fundraising isn't the most important element for all HRA members, but still serves a purpose...

- "I am hoping that my fundraising people can tune in or watch the replay of the meeting. There is value and learning from other fundraising organizations who are struggling."

COVID has made things harder...

- "Particularly post-covid, sharing strategies for fundraising and donor engagement for research would be useful for member organizations."
- "It would be a good thing if fundraising got more focus as it is tougher during covid."

We can explore new models...

- "How can we help evolve innovative approaches that drive science forward but are not only funding grants?"

Ideas & Recommendations: Fundraising & Grantmaking

Taken from a survey open-end: "More regularly updating versions of legal and grantmaking documents like grant agreement templates and terms and conditions -- big funders with in house legal teams can really help out the smaller funders by sharing their updates in rapidly evolving areas like data sharing ethics and IP. Also maybe some kind of process improvement database -- I've learned about lots of cool ways of doing things by looking through other funder docs, but it'd be nice to have these organized somehow, in a place where people can add their latest prototypes and improvements to the grantmaking process."

External Opportunities/Expanding Reach

HRA has a strong internal community of members, but each member organization has an expansive network outside of HRA to offer as well.

HRA's member orgs span a wide range of backgrounds and profiles. Even within HRA's member organizations, there is room to make everyone part of this community...

- "I don't have a science background so I feel a bit out of place sometimes" (*Note: this sentiment was repeated by several interviewees*)

There is also an opportunity to go outside HRA's existing member organizations...

- (*When responding to a question about "What's missing"*) "Perhaps something about engaging partners (gov't, industry, academia) in a strategic manner in order to ensure sustainability/scalability of work?"
- HRA members all have their own networks in the external healthcare community and could "have a great impact and be a key player in the national arena as a whole"

Ideas & Recommendations: External Opportunities/Expanding Reach

Bring in outside experts as 'special guests'

Invite policy experts and others in the healthcare community as 'special guests' to meetings. They can serve as to as inspiration, new perspectives, and collaborators in hyper-focused worksessions. This will create shared ownership and excitement that benefits all parties. Done right, it will not take an extraordinary amount of time and effort.

HRA Reporter/Analyzer/Open

HRA members have access to a ton of valuable data, but it can be difficult to provide and sift through using tools like HRA Reporter/Analyzer/Open.

These tools have great potential and are off to a good start...

- “HRA analyzer data on outcomes and impact assessment is great”
- “HRA enables us to pursue and impact issues in biomedical research that we would not be able to do as a single organization. For example, promote access to research publications via PubMed Central or to make grant data available to the research community via HRA Reporter.”

There is great potential here, but from the interviews and survey, we learned the process of using these tools can be a roadblock...

- “It has been difficult to provide data”
- “I like the idea...but find the process cumbersome”
- “We have not had time to import our data, and we think it would only be valuable if we can compare our data with that from other organizations”
- “I have used HRA analyzer a couple of times, but it is new and depends on a critical mass of data (to be useful)”

Further, one of the hypothetical 2030 Yelp reviews in our workshop speaks to the importance of data exchange...

- “By sharing and exchanging information, HRA is transformational for translational research and the biomedical research enterprise.”

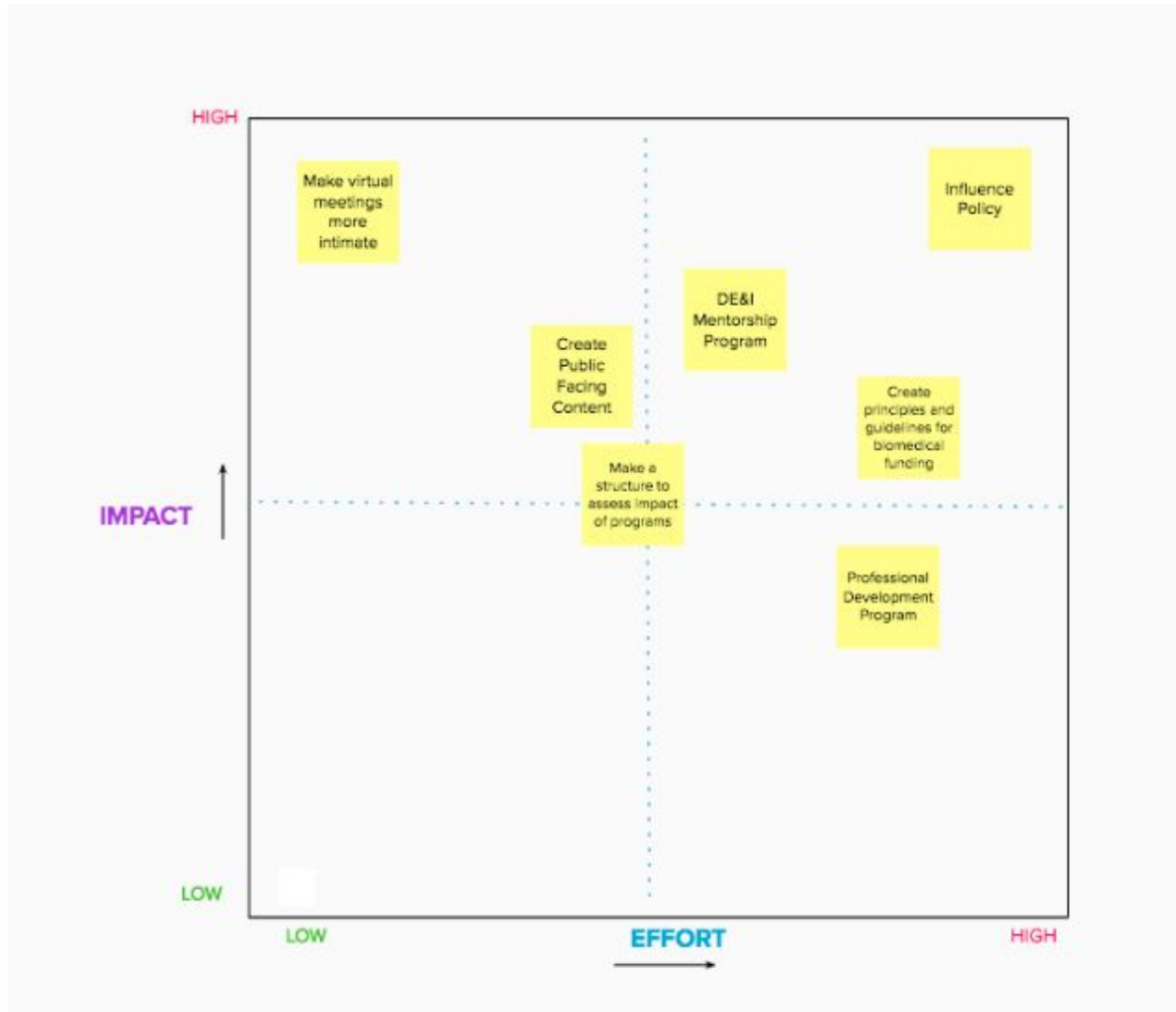
Ideas & Recommendations: HRA Reporter/Analyzer/Open

Make these tools more user-friendly

Put some resources toward this to reach the critical mass mentioned above.

How to Prioritize

Many possible initiatives may stem from this project. Below is one possible way to prioritize the range of potential initiatives that may be of interest to the committee and community. This 2x2 matrix allows for ranking initiatives based on effort vs impact. Please note the placement of these initiatives is for demonstration purposes only.



Consider taking your favorite recommendations from this report and plotting them on a matrix like this. Then, select 1-3 ideas from the top left box (the low-hanging fruit) and commit to completing them in the short term (1-3 years). Select 1-2 ideas from the top right box and commit to completing them in the longer term (3-10 years).

Environmental Scan

Introduction & Process Overview

COVID-19 has changed the way we see "work", "life", and the divisions between those two things. Specifically, social distancing and a remote work renaissance have had a profound impact on the meaning of community, and the ways in which communities engage with one another, that will last forever. Regardless of core cause, membership organizations will need to rise to the occasion to play a part in filling the need to belong.

Now, more than ever before, people are craving community, but at the same time, they are frustrated with a lack of facilitation and facilities. In addition, with newfound "free time" thanks to the elimination of commutes and somewhat distracting office banter, people are hungry to invest the time they have into learning and entertainment.

Membership organizations will have to adapt to not only the digital landscape, but the hybrid one; fundamentally rethink and diversify their revenue streams. Executive Directors will have to become community managers. Events will have to become bespoke, intimate, and entertaining, even in a time that feels far from it. Research organizations will have to fight for respect; work to defend the importance of scientific research unlike ever before.

The following provides an overview of key signals of change in spaces directly and peripherally related to the environment HRA operates within. As the future is impossible to predict, this report aims to provoke new ideas for the directions HRA may and may not want to go in, in service of the strategic plan.

Signals of Change

But I Don't Wanna Go Back To Work...

What? One of the biggest shifts in day-to-day life that COVID-19 brought with it was a sudden elimination of office work culture. According to the US Census Bureau, 1/3 of the workforce is able to work remotely. In the early days of the adoption of a work-from-home lifestyle, workers across the country began with a honeymoon phase – appreciating the ~1-2 hours saved on commute time to re-invest into sleeping more, taking up hobbies, or learning new skills. Then, the honeymoon phase came to a halt. Then, we just kind of got used to it. In fact, according to a survey done by LADBible, two thirds do not want to return to work in an office. For some, this may be due to a fear of infection, for others, this is a sign of enjoying the flexibility long appreciated by the remote work community. In addition, according to a report by Buffer and AngelList, 98% of workers would like a remote work option post-COVID.

So what? Many companies and organizations will feel the pressure of their staff's demand to have remote work options. For organizations that don't give in, turnover will occur, leading to some key members of HRA fleeing to new industries. For organizations that do give in, they might find themselves with a staff that is across many time zones, making it challenging to coordinate meetings and gatherings. In addition, the proliferation of remote work may lead to a continued increase in virtual meetings, or hybrid meetings (with some physically present, and some engaging in telepresence). While HRA has learned to adapt to virtual environments, the presence of a hybrid modality could bring with it a new set of challenges to ensure participants feel heard, and part of the community, even if they are not physically present.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.ladbible.com/news/uk-two-thirds-of-people-dont-want-to-go-back-to-work-in-august-20200717>
- <https://lp.buffer.com/state-of-remote-work-2020> (full report)
 - <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/how-people-and-companies-feel-about-working-remotely/> (summary of the State of Remote Work 2020 report)

A Rise In "Intimate" Events

What? One logical post-COVID theory is that a new appreciation for face-to-face events will arise. A kind of, "didn't know how good we had it 'till it was gone", feeling. But, for many people, the feeling of being in a densely populated room will be triggering. More intimate and targeted events may become the norm, opening up doors to new strategies and opportunities in event planning and community building.

For example, in 2014, the Indiana University Alumni Association moved away from hosting large events and instead invested in more targeted events that were built around a central theme. This theme represented a common interest of a smaller subset of their alumni community. While this resulted in the design and delivery of more events overall, it is said to have led to "stronger bonds with individuals who are most likely to join, donate, and renew year after year."

So what? The rise in more intimate events and communities could lend itself well to the way HRA currently operates. As the organization and its community is aligned around a very specific topic/area of study, this may become its most compelling value proposition. However, the organization may expand upon its existing stakeholder group segmentation to make it even more easier for people to find their "tribe" within the organization, and build events that are wholly focused on those tribes.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- "Using data gleaned from a propensity study, the organization (IUAA) creates smaller, more targeted events that bring together individuals with a common interest. This enables IUAA to forge stronger bonds with individuals who are most likely to join, donate, and renew year after year." [Innovations in Membership Engagement: A Benchmarking Study, avenuemroup.com, 2014]
- "Norman believes that designing smaller, intimate gatherings will become more prevalent in the future. This could allow brands to measure key performance indicators by engaging small groups of influencers as opposed to large events full of people." ["What Will Event Design Look Like After Coronavirus?", <https://technical.ly/philly/2020/07/10/what-will-event-design-look-like-after-coronavirus-live-nation-livestreaming-warehouse-watts-6ix8ight-roots-picnic-virtual-concerts-future/>]
- Book: The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker
<https://www.amazon.com/Art-Gathering-How-Meet-Matters/dp/1594634920>

It's HOW Much?!

What? According to Deloitte's annual "Digital Media Trends" survey, nearly half (47%) of U.S. consumers indicated a sense of frustration with the amount of subscriptions and platforms they have to obtain to be able to watch what they want. This "membership fatigue" may not solely be a tech problem, though. For the Whitney Museum, membership fatigue, and a concern of diminishing perceived value, led to more customizable membership benefits. For the Metal Treating Institute, an abundance of competitors and options that are dubbed "next best" to their own membership organization led to a reduction in the amount of offerings. In reducing the offerings down to the very best they have to offer, the organization was able to stand out from the crowd, and grow membership.

In a similar space, Online Education and virtual events are having a really hard time getting people to pay full price. Students are planning to withhold tuition payments, and large events like Comic Con offered their entire conference experience online, for free.

So what? To deal with membership fatigue, HRA may need to move away from an expansion mindset, and more toward a narrowing mindset. What does the organization do really well? Only do that. What kind of events are the most well attended? In addition, offering too many events online for free may set a very dangerous precedent for the future of virtual meetings, especially if online events continue to be the norm for years to come. This may potentially require foresight into new revenue streams for membership organizations.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- Membership fatigue (a la Netflix, etc.)
 - "Nearly half (47%) of U.S. consumers say they're frustrated by the growing number of subscriptions and services required to watch what they want, according to the 13th edition of Deloitte's annual Digital Media Trends survey."
[<https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/streaming-subscription-fatigue-us-consumers-deloitte-study-1203166046/>]
 - Make it feel more specific to the needs of each member: "By tapping into each individual's core values and allowing them to customize their benefits, we hope to deliver a bespoke membership that is meaningful to them personally and responds directly to their interests and needs." – J Whitney Museum
 - Metal Treating Institute (MTI)
 - When asked what their organization could do that others could not, the answer was "financial benchmarking to help manage operations and purchasing decisions, including monthly sales statistics, forecasts and quarterly outlooks." Ultimately offering less allowed the organization to deal with the fact that there are many "next best organizations" out there doing a lot of the same work as them. In addition, the organization invested more heavily in digital to attract a younger generation. [Innovations in Membership Engagement: A Benchmarking Study, avenuemroup.com, 2014]
- Online education valued as "less than" in-person
 - "College students say the online instruction they're getting in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic is not the education for which they paid. Some students plan to withhold tuition payments; others are demanding partial tuition refunds." [Inside Higher Ed, "Feeling Shortchanged"
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/13/students-say-online-classes-arent-what-they-paid>]
- For organizations that rely on in-person events, they can move online, but revenue streams might need to change
 - SXSW to be entirely online in 2021
[<https://www.bizjournals.com/austin/news/2020/09/23/sxsw-return-2021.html>]
 - Comic Con @ Home entirely online and free in 2020
[<https://deadline.com/2020/05/san-diego-comic-con-at-home-announced-1202930618/>]

Everyone's A Scientist. Even Seals.

What? Citizen science includes the participation of nonscientists in gathering and processing data according to specific protocols, and in decision-making contexts that leverage scientific knowledge. There is now a substantial recent history of the contributions of nonscientists in the creation and verification of scientific knowledge. But while we think of nonscientists as human "citizens," there is now an opportunity to expand this concept of citizen scientist to include non-humans, such as animals, artificial intelligences, and other non-human entities. The range of beings who are helping with gathering and utilizing scientific knowledge will continue to grow.

“A team of scientists recently published the first paper on a deepwater current surrounding west Antarctica, known as the Circumpolar Deep Water (CDW). And to help them with the actual research, they recruited a few locals: seven southern elephant seals and seven Weddell seals.

We’ve tried to build ships to withstand the harsh conditions of Antarctica, but evolution keeps proving a far superior engineer. These seals have been surviving Antarctic winters for millennia, and are much better assistants for scientific research in this setting than other humans or machines. Over the entire course of the study, their transmitters pinged back 10,000 measurements. That was five times more the total amount of data that had been collected by moorings in the past two decades. And those moorings are immobile; the seals managed to cover 150,000 sq km of the icy continent’s coast.”

So what? The opportunities for ongoing, ubiquitous data gathering and processing in sometimes difficult contexts continue to expand. Who (or what) could HRA's members partner with to gather critical data, or process it for faster learning and deeper insights? What role can HRA play as a "data facilitator" for its community? It likely won't be as obvious or "simple" as seals who can be outfitted with instruments, but there may be pathways for partnerships that have heretofore been unimagined.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://qz.com/1286339/seals-helped-climate-scientists-study-the-circumpolar-deep-water-off-the-coast-of-west-antarctica/>
- <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07106-5>

Black Lives Matter.

What? 2020 brought with it the COVID-19 pandemic, but also a spotlight on a pandemic that's been in existence for far longer: systemic racism. With the rise of programs and initiatives that are pushing organizations beyond one-line acknowledgments, and toward a total re-think of their own systems and internal structures, Black Lives Matter is a movement that's impossible to ignore.

So what? For membership-driven organizations, like HRA, the Black Lives Matter is an even more significant movement. Membership-driven = community-driven. HRA should put consistent and conscious efforts behind making the organization a safe place for all people, while also allowing room for difficult conversations in the medical research industry about issues of race and equity.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.developmentguild.com/thought-leadership/nonprofits-address-blm-and-dei/>

Artificial intelligence recognized as inventors?

What? Law professor Ryan Abbott told BBC News: "These days, you commonly have AIs writing books and taking pictures - but if you don't have a traditional author, you cannot get copyright protection in the US. If AI is going to be how we're inventing things in the future, the whole intellectual property system will fail to work. Prof Abbott acknowledged lawmakers might need to get involved to settle the matter and that it could take until the mid-2020s to resolve the issue."

So what? The landscape of patent law and invention is critically important for medical research. In terms of future workplaces, the combination of human+machine is going to make collaboration potentially more inventive, with all of the IP law ramifications, but will create new complexities for crediting contributions fairly. How might HRA integrate or support human-machine collaboration? How might evaluation, credit, and feedback on work differ in this future?

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-49191645>

Less Bang for the Science Buck

What? "Over the past century, we've vastly increased the time and money invested in science, but in scientists' own judgement, we're producing the most important breakthroughs at a near-constant rate. On a per-dollar or per-person basis, this suggests that science is becoming far less efficient."

Even though funding, Ph.D.s, and publications have risen sharply, many fields are seeing less return, in terms of knowledge, on money and time invested.

So what? This report (below) argues that scientific discovery is becoming more complicated and less efficient than it once was. That could be because there is so much more knowledge to understand in the first place, and therefore it takes much longer to advance beyond what has already been done. Is there an institutional response that can improve the ROI on scientific investment? Are we not seeing the breakthrough on the horizon, or have we exhausted the gains from the methods we are using? How important are transformational gains for HRA, or are incremental gains that require more and more investment tolerable for the future?

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2018/11/diminishing-returns-science/575665>

The Zoom Boom

What? We are seeing an innovation boom in new tools for remote work and community building. Zoom usage alone grew by 353.7% over the course of one year, and so did revenues. Mural and Miro, two competing virtual collaboration platforms, have also reported significant growth. Soon-to-be graduates are learning on these same platforms, creating a new literacy.

So what? Members may become more and more literate in remote working tools, making online events and convening more simple and seamless.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/latest-news-headlines/zom-s-massive-growth-amid-covid-19-set-to-continue-after-pandemic-analysts-say-58907516>

Here We Are Now, Edutain Us.

What? Educational entertainment (or "edutainment") trends are also shifting during COVID-19. According to Deluxe, some of the top new forms of entertainment include: Desire to learn new skills online, video chatting with friends, virtual tours, reading books, drive-in movie theatres, and more.

So what? Soon, every industry will be the edutainment industry. HRA can learn from/participate in these trends.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.deluxe.com/blog/entertainment-trends-during-covid/>

Email Is The New Black

What? Over the years, major social media platforms have rarely been at risk of closing. But it has happened. In 2016, just four years after being acquired by Twitter, Vine was shut down. The popular social media platform focused largely on short video content (much like TikTok does today). When it closed down, thousands of brands lost their audience seemingly overnight. Flash forward to 2020, TikTok almost faced a similar fate, with the threat of it being banned in the United States.

So What? The near death of these platforms should be a concern for any organization that is focused on membership and community. It is a brutal reminder of how important it is to own your own community, and to invest more heavily in platforms that are transferable. While it is very simple, this may suggest the importance of investing more into email marketing and listservs, as well as SMS-based modes of engagement. HRA should consider email list-building strategies, and ways to make the email lists more meaningful and valuable.

Additional inspiration & further reading:

- <https://www.theverge.com/2016/10/28/13456208/why-vine-died-twitter-shutdown>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/27/tech/tiktok-ban-judge/index.html>

Possibilities

Scenario 01: Digital continues to grow, post-COVID. Just as the subscription/membership model has become a go-to revenue model in the private sector, the nonprofit world also adopts this model en masse. This leads to a new wave of competition that forces HRA to address challenges of membership fatigue, value proposition, and program development. Additional revenue streams are necessary to stay afloat, and new marketing strategies need to emerge.

Scenario 02: A widespread call for more intimate gatherings leads HRA to develop even more committees and sub-communities within its membership. These communities focus on allowing the organization to become hyper-segmented and attract/retain more members as a result. These communities require a rapid growth of internal resources for the organization, along with funding to support the growth of events and programs.

Scenario 03: HRA struggles to stay afloat due to a widespread growth in the disbelief of the value and ROI of scientific research. The organization juggles two missions: one that continues to elevate biomedical related research, and another that advocates for the importance of doing such work in a way that was not previously necessary. The weight of educating the public and appeasing critics who see the research results as "too slow" becomes too much, leading to an additional hire for support on communications and public educational initiatives.

Strategic Planning Intensive

Introduction & Process Overview

On October 30, 2020, verynice facilitated a three hour workshop intensive with 30 participants from the HRA community to collect a wide range of perspectives and creative ideas for the future of the organization. The workshop began with a presentation of the high-level findings from our Stakeholder Analysis and Environmental Scan. Next, participants engaged in three key activities. An overview of each activity, along with a synthesis of the key insights from each is included here.

Picture Collapse

The “Picture Collapse” segment of our intensive included a two part discussion:

- If HRA were to cease operations today, what would the world miss out on in 10 years?
- What does this tell us about the value of the organization?

The activity revealed a number of value propositions that the organization can lean on, including:

- **Community-driven:** The organization is an inclusive and diverse community that provides a safe place for sharing failures, tools, and best practices that ultimately help members improve their organizations and build their capacity.
- **Problem-solving:** The organization is a powerful space for professional development, mentorship, and partnership that allows its members to make an even greater impact by saving time and money, and sharing resources.
- **Forward-thinking:** The organization is a hub of data, information, and trends that its members can leverage to map their next big move as an organization.

Picture Success

Our “Picture Success” activity began with a challenge for each team to create a “Yelp review from the year 2030”, highlighting a benefit from the perspective of a member in the future. All six of these reviews are included below:

- HRA provided excellent service. I loved the simple utility of HRAnalyzer and its full integration with NIH Reporter to be a comprehensive funding database for successful landscape analyses. It also continues to be a source of inspiration and collaboration. The vast number of templates and best practices shared in the various Listservs and resource sections of the website saved me valuable time and money. Food was just ok.
- Since joining HRA, I learned so much from my colleagues that I was able to start and direct a new grants dept at a new foundation. Great members meeting – learned a lot! Loved the different topics that are relevant to my day to day. Look forward to seeing all these great colleagues.
- Great group of people, good leadership and diversity of people. HRA provides great opportunity for professional development via mentoring programs and smaller in-person and virtual gatherings. Saves our organization money by enabling us to make better decisions based on data and best practices from others.
- Amazing creative sharing of expertise and tools by HRA member organizations and help others be better at biomedical research funding. Great value! Join HRA!
- Fantastic health sciences philanthropic community with inspirational leaders, willing to share best practices. Enabled us the strength and inspiration to push forward our organization’s groundbreaking advances.
- HRA has been an organization that sets standards for biomedical funding. By sharing and exchanging information, HRA is transformational for translational research and the biomedical research enterprise. FIVE STARS!

Some notable trends in the reviews include: sharing and exchanging information, sharing best practices, sharing tools, supporting the community in advancing funding, mentorship, emphasis on smaller and virtual gatherings, saving valuable time and money.

This activity served as an anchor to an exercise in backcasting, in which each team created a high-level timeline of events and milestones that would allow the organization to realize that future. Each timeline is included below:

Team 01:

- 2020: Recalibrate activities in a “post-COVID” world
- 2022: HRA Analyzer: improved usability and integrate with NIH Reporter
- 2025: Create public facing, impactful content
- 2027: New model of collaboration communities
- 2030: Increase efficiency

Team 02:

- 2020: Create a focused effort to facilitate online meetings, working groups, and creating and sharing resources that identify holes and fill gaps.

- 2022: After the 1st effort – narrow our focus to what is important to HRA and members. Share what we learned. Evaluate it.
- 2025: HRA is recognized as thought leader – our voice counts.
- 2027: Influence national policy
- 2030: Help HRA members achieve missions

Team 03:

- 2020: Assess HRA's support of its staff – are we doing enough for them?
- 2022: Develop professional development track of curriculum
- 2025: Assess health and viability of membership dues structure vs. other opportunities for income. Assess impact of professional development program.
- 2027: In-person and virtual interactions show increased value to members.
- 2030: Assess HRA's tools used for communications and sharing to/among members

Team 04:

- 2020: Continue to have valuable interactions
- 2022: Ongoing assessment of needs and resources of organizations]
- 2025: Balanced growth with maintenance of intimacy.
- 2027: Continued flexibility and openness to the current environment
- 2030: Looking beyond current needs to future opportunities (e.g. AI)

Team 05:

- 2020: Outreach to different members in multiple countries; outreach communications campaign; joint pitch deck/value proposition; pooling of resources
- 2022: Issues of health impacting diverse populations; increase openness to organizations affecting other kinds of research/more in global space
- 2025: Focus on workforce development with founders and with our grantees; represent the global population; outreach to federal founders and policy makers; public-private partnerships
- 2027: Strategic planning/response task force for mobilization of funds/communication/access to healthcare/research
- 2030: Diverse workforce and grantees; integrated organizational responses to anticipate needs of the community; quadruple membership in 25 countries around the world; Global responses to improving health worldwide; go-to place for the next health crisis/science funding response

Team 06:

- 2020: Best practices on grants lifecycle
- 2022: Best practices to improve/support biomedical workforce
- 2025: More cross-founder collaborations in funding (means more agreement in how to fund)
- 2027: Collective principles and guidelines for biomedical funding is widely accepted. (Standards of practice).
- 2030: Communicate broadly the standards – be a collective voice/national authority.

Some notable submissions and trends in the timelines include: Development of a professional development track, consistent assessment of impact and programs, elevate HRA's recognition as an authority, creating public-facing content, creation of principles and guidelines for biomedical funding, making strides in DEI, maintaining an intimate feeling despite growth.

Vision Statement Sprint

Our final exercise was a series of three sprints that, when combined, create a three part vision statement that includes impact, value proposition, and resources. Each team developed a series of attributes to contribute to the vision statement, based on a series of prompts that we provided them with during the session. Following the session, participants were asked to evaluate the submissions of the group as a whole, and vote on the attributes that were most attractive to them. The following is an overview of the top submissions, per statement (with a 70% response rate from attendees):

The problem we want to address is:

- Top selection: Collaboration, efficiency, networking, best practices
- Runner-up(s): Professional development - to build organizations' effectiveness by building strong staff and leadership and an inclusive and diverse community; breaking down barriers and silos to reduce disease and improve human health

HRA will strive to serve:

- Top selection: Member organizations in their roles to augment research which ultimately leads to patient benefit
- Runner-up(s): Our community of philanthropy, researchers, and patients, while bringing in stakeholder in non-health related fields to help accelerate us to the goal to make an impact on global health

We'll track progress by measuring:

- Top selection: Have members implemented changes in practices?
- Runner-up(s): Publications, discoveries, breakthroughs, clinical trials, number of scientists/early-career investigators supported/retained in field

HRA helps its target audience achieve their greatest need, which is:

- Top selection: For membership organizations, sharing of knowledge/information, best practices, lessons learned, and helping each org improve effectiveness of membership orgs.
- Runner-up(s): Access to timely, relevant, curated resources on funding biomedical research to enable them to be as effective and impactful as possible

In doing so, HRA captures value for the organization through:

- Top selection: Becoming the international, trusted go-to source for identifying emerging trends and best practices of biomedical research funders
- Runner-up(s): Deepening engagement of member orgs - increases value to members; being the facilitator of collecting and distributing knowledge, builds the brand of HRA and establishes HRA as an authority

To accomplish this goal, HRA must obtain resources, including:

- Top selection: Increasing staff and/or volunteer resources, optimal technological platforms for communication, broader membership (including international)
- Runner-up(s): Money, open to and connected to broader resources, internal opportunities to increase collaborations, increased internal staff, access to other resources that we can bring back to HRA, marketing expertise, better tool/new hire to curate listserv information; human capital (staff & volunteers) as well as technology

Which it will obtain by:

- Top selection: Robust sharing by membership; additional budget or decreasing effort in current areas
- Runner-up(s): Creating committee to drive effort, having meetings/surveys with governmental/other orgs that give grants, increasing dues

Appendix

Additional Survey Data

See PDF included with this report.

Additional Signals of Change

The following are a series of additional signals of change that were submitted during the Strategic Planning Intensive workshop session by participants:

Increasing tension between globalization and nationalism

Decolonizing philanthropy

Further reading on evolving nature of philanthropy:

1. <https://www.tpi.org/resources/philanthropic-resources-for-covid-19-response>
2. <https://www.tpi.org/resources/racial-equity-resources-for-philanthropy>

Specific to biomedical research, acknowledgement and action about harassment

Climate change, the ongoing threat of pandemics, and political unrest

Diversity and intersectionality

Healthcare delivery and finances may look very different in 10 years: Public options? Value-based systems? Pricing for drugs established, at least in part, by agencies external to manufacturers?