

2023 IMPACT REPORT

HEALTH RESEARCH ALLIANCE

A collaborative member organization of nonprofit research funders committed to maximizing the impact of biomedical research to improve human health.



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear HRA Members,

IMPACT. COLLABORATE. INNOVATE. Those words are used in our strategic plan and many other places to describe how HRA is so successful at maximizing the impact of biomedical research. But in looking back over the past several years, it has become obvious that we need to add LEAD to that list. We are thought leaders – yes. But more importantly we are ACTION LEADERS.

HRA members identify and discuss challenges using formats such as Learning Community open mics, sessions at Members Meetings, or questions posted to the listserv. Once challenges have been identified, we create infrastructure and resources to address those challenges, be it a learning community, a best practices guide, a collaboration with another sector - whatever is needed. We don't just make recommendations; we act on them. For example, we launched the Inclusive Grantmaking Initiative and hired Jenna Hicks as the lead, to act on our recommendations in "[Strategies for inclusive grantmaking](#)" [Commentary in Nature Medicine](#). The IGI has already led to a Bias Mitigation training for staff of HRA member organizations (the reviewer module will come out in 2024) and a Demographic Data Collection Guide (see page 5 for more information).

HRA members asking colleagues for advice is often another spark for action. Via HRA's listserv, HRA members reached out to colleagues for advice on policies and procedures designed to address toxic behavior in academia. As a result of this dialogue, we launched the Misconduct & Ethics Learning Community to investigate the role funders can and should play. In another example, the newly formed Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLM) Learning Community was formed, not only to share challenges and solutions in the area of grantmaking, but explore how this technology can transform biomedical science to advance discovery and benefit patients. These are just a few examples of how formidable leveraging the power of 110 organizations can be.

I look forward to another productive year, as HRA members roll up our sleeves and take action to advance scientific discovery.



MARYROSE FRANKO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





FACILITATING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

One of the major goals of HRA's Strategic Plan is to foster HRA community by supporting collaborations, building relationships, and facilitating networking opportunities. In 2023, HRA launched multiple new initiatives to facilitate connections amongst HRA members.

Regional HRA Meetings brought together HRA members in Washington, DC and Phoenix, AZ for informal networking and discussions about DEI strategies. Thanks to the Alzheimer's Association and the Flinn Foundation for supporting these regional meetings!

Learning Communities and Interest Groups facilitate connections between HRA members with similar roles and interests. In 2023, HRA supported 9 learning communities, 2 interest groups, and hosted quarterly CEO Roundtable meetings. Two of these groups were newly formed in 2023:

- Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Models Learning Community
- Clinical Trials Interest Group

HRA Peer Circles, part of HRA's professional development program, are small groups of peers from different HRA member organizations that meet regularly to share ideas and discuss topics of mutual interest. Thanks to Marina Triplett, HRA's Professional Development Intern, HRA launched the Peer Circles Program this summer. To meet continued interest, a second cohort of Peer Circles was started in the winter. There are now 93 individuals from 60 HRA member organizations participating in the Peer Circles Program!

Peer Circles Program

93 Participants

60 HRA Member Organizations

SUPPORTING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

HRA is proud of the many ways in which we've supported the development of the biomedical workforce, including HRA member-supported awardees, graduate student and postdoc HRA interns, and individuals employed by HRA member organizations!

HRA's **Professional Development Program** aims to increase organizational and philanthropic sector capacity by enhancing the effectiveness of staff of HRA member organizations. In 2023, we launched the Peer Circles Program to support HRA members in building their networks, and hosted an interactive professional development session at the Fall Members Meeting: [Managing Conflict and Challenging Conversations at Work](#).

The **Research Workforce & Early Career Development Learning Community**, supported by HRA Intern Jamie Garcia, continued to explore ways to support early career researchers through their 2023 community calls and Members Meeting Sessions:

- [April Open Mic \(Alumni Networks\)](#)
- [Leading Edge Symposium](#)
- [Fall 2023 Members Meeting Open Mic](#)

The Learning Community submitted a response to the National Institutes of Health Request for Information: Re-envisioning U.S. Postdoctoral Research Training and Career Progression, highlighting the importance of supporting international postdocs, adequate compensation, healthy work environments, and multiple career options.

HRA's Intern Program

HRA's Internship Program, established in 2017, has been running strong for 7 years and we are so grateful for and proud of our **14 current and former interns!** Our interns have and are supporting HRA's important projects and initiatives, including organizing our twice-annual members meetings, supporting our learning communities, and facilitating programs like the Peer Circles Program. HRA interns have gone onto full-time positions at HRA member organizations, biotech companies, universities and research institutes, and federal funders.

2023 INTERNS



Mandy Westland
(Vanderbilt)

Marina Triplett
(Columbia)

Jamie Garcia
(Vanderbilt)

"I'm extremely grateful for my time as an HRA intern as it gave me the opportunity to do meaningful work that aimed to improve the biomedical research community. I also learned about careers in science philanthropy and was able to create connections with individuals from numerous non-profit organizations which ultimately helped me find and secure a job after graduate school."

- Lindsay Redman-Rivera, Program Officer at Health Resources in Action, former HRA Intern



KEY IDEAS
Bias Mitigation Training for Program Staff

Types of Bias
Bias Mitigation in Peer Review Training

The Bias Mitigation in Peer Review Training defined several types of bias and gave examples of how these biases may manifest during peer review. This handbook summarizes these types of bias and select references that present evidence for the impact of said biases on peer review.

Bias is a preference, assumption, belief, attitude or stereotype towards or against a person, group, or thing.

The table below defines various types of bias, and highlights scenarios or quotes that could exemplify the indicated bias in action. These examples are simplified, condensed versions of what are likely to be highly nuanced interactions in real-life review settings. Many of the biases below may not be evident within a single statement from a review meeting, in part because they are better characterized by patterns of behavior over the course of repeated decision making (the inconsistent application of evaluation criteria or differential treatment of applicants, incorrect interpretation of not-explicit evaluation criteria, or cognitive biases that may not be verbalized as part of a discussion).

Type of Bias	Definition	Example	Select Ref.
Gender bias	Differential treatment based on one's real or perceived gender identity	A lack of detail in a woman's proposal is attributed to a deficit in her ability (quote below), but a similar lack of detail in a man's proposal is considered a flaw in the proposal, not in the applicant himself. "The proposal lacks some detail in the methodology for Aim 1; I don't think she's going to be able to complete the project if she has such an understated understanding of the techniques she plans to use."	8-10
Institutional bias	Differential treatment or consideration based on or consideration of an institution's reputation, size, type, location, or other research conducted at that institution	An institution with lower resources is compared to a better-resourced, prestigious institutions and deemed inferior, instead of evaluating whether the resources that are available at the institution are sufficient to carry out the proposed project (irrespective of what may be available elsewhere). "This proposal is innovative and exciting. But I don't think this should score higher than the previous application from Stanford. I'm not so confident that this project will actually be completed. This applicant just doesn't have access to the same caliber of facilities as the previous institution."	8-10

Health Research Alliance Bias Mitigation Training for Program Staff (September 2022)

KEY IDEAS
Bias Mitigation Training for Program Staff

Strategies to Mitigate Bias in Peer Review
Bias Mitigation in Peer Review Training

This handbook is a companion to the asynchronous Bias Mitigation in Peer Review Training for program staff developed by the Health Research Alliance. This handbook summarizes the strategies discussed in the training for easy reference.

Reviewer Guidelines

- Establish clear evaluative criteria, quality definitions, and scoring guidelines.
- Request explicit justification for assigned scores
- Prompt reviewers to periodically self-assess bias
 - Explicit Association Test from Project Implicit
 - Self-evaluation questions like "Am I spending equal time and attention on each application?" or "Are my comments similarly constructive / critical for all applicants?"

Meeting Structure

- Instead of following rank order, randomize the order in which applications are discussed to minimize anchoring or confirmation bias
- Rotate the order in which reviewers speak
- Spend the same amount of time discussing applications of similar quality
- Schedule frequent breaks to minimize decision fatigue

Question Bias in Discussion

Is there new information that wasn't noted by other reviewers; can you point out where that information is included in the application?	Re: Info not in the application	Re: Info not related to review criteria	Re: Possibly biased comments
	Can you discuss how that factor relates to the review criteria?	Can you elaborate on what you mean when you said (XYZ)?	When you said (XYZ), that could be interpreted as (describe bias). Can you clarify what you mean?
	The review criteria do not include (ABC factor), so this should not be part of the discussion and should not impact the applicant's score.		



INTRODUCTION

Collecting demographic data consistently, accurately, and respectfully allows funders to monitor the diversity of their applicants, awardees, and reviewers, and assess ways in which their processes and practices may be creating barriers or inequities for certain demographic groups. This guide is intended to facilitate collection of demographic data in ways that comply with current legal and regulatory requirements by providing sample data use statements and sample questionnaire language. However, this is a constantly evolving area of the law, perhaps more so than ever today. Consequently, the Health Research Alliance strongly recommends that funders regularly incorporate legal review of their policies and practices in this area to ensure they comply with all relevant local, state and federal requirements.

01 – Data Use Statements
Demographic data collection (even if it includes a data use statement that informs respondents why information is being collected, who will have access, and how it will be used and disclosed) Where possible, these statements should be made in a way that includes the overall effect of (Organization name)'s applicant evaluation and grant award processes and practices across various demographic groups".

02 – Questionnaire Language
This section contains sample questionnaire language for gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Sample phrasing drawn from publicly available nonprofit practice guides, and where possible, advised by recommendations set forth by organizations representing identity groups about which data is being collected.

03 – Appendices
Appendix 1 contains demographic questions used by the National Institutes of Health.
Appendix 2 contains outside counsel insight about the Supreme Court's decision in the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College case and elements of the decision that may be relevant to demographic data collection in contexts other than the college admissions process.

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The Health Research Alliance launched the Inclusive Grantmaking Initiative (IGI) in 2022, thanks to generous support from the Doris Duke Foundation, James S. McDonnell Foundation, and the Rita Allen Foundation. In 2023, Jenna Hicks was hired as the IGI Project Lead.

The IGI has made great progress in 2023 by creating new resources to support HRA members: the **Bias Mitigation in Peer Review Training for Program Staff**, and a **Guide to Collecting Demographic Data**.

HRA continued to enhance members' efforts in the DEI space via DEI Learning Community Calls, and dedicated Members Meeting sessions, including:

- Evidence-based Strategies that Lead to a Diverse Awardee Portfolio (Spring Members Meeting)
- Strategies for Collecting Demographic Data
- Open Mic – International Diversity
- Discussion of NASEM report on Advancing Antiracism and DEI
- How Minority Serving Institutions Advance Antiracism & DEI

This year, HRA also established a new Clinical Trials Interest Group, which is initially focusing on increasing DEI in clinical trials. So far, discussions have centered around ways to increase access to clinical trials, including online Trial Finder tools.



FOSTERING OPEN SCIENCE

In 2023, HRA continued striving to improve the scientific research process by providing resources and support for HRA members to explore, develop, and implement open science practices.

Thanks to support from a generous HRA member, we launched the **Exploring the Value of Open (EVO) Program**. The EVO Program, led by consultant Kristen Ratan from [Stratos](#), explores why and how to implement open research policies and practices, and ways to measure their impact.

Exploring the Value of Open Program

5 Webinars in 2023

200+ Webinar Attendees

3 Small Group Cohorts

Open Science Tools

- [NASEM Toolkit for Fostering Open Science Practices](#)
- [HRA Open Science Policy Worksheet \(from Stratos\)](#)
- [HRA Open](#)
- [Health Open Research, an F1000 Platform](#)

EVO webinars focused on data sharing, open publishing, policies, and measuring impact. Check out the recordings and associated resources:

- [The 2023 Federal Year of Open Science Initiative](#)
- [HRA Facilitating Open “Birds of a Feather” Series: Data Sharing](#)
- [Intro to Health Open Research: An open research publishing option using F1000](#)
- [Data Sharing and Policy Landscape](#)
- [Data Sharing – Best Practices and Measuring Impact](#)

The EVO Program also facilitated small group “Birds of a Feather” cohort working sessions and one-on-one consultative sessions with Kristen Ratan. In these sessions, participants worked through challenges and explored strategies to identify appropriate approaches for their organizations.

COMMUNICATING IMPACT

Multiple Learning Community Calls, Members Meeting sessions, and HRA webinars explored strategies for measuring and communicating your organization's impact in 2023.

HRA Members Meeting sessions and webinars presented strategies and considerations for communicating your organization's impact:

- [Open Mic: Developing strategic approaches to communicating the value of your research](#)
- [Approaches to track and highlight the successes of our grantees](#)
- [Strategies for Communicating Your Organization's Impact](#)

In addition to HRA Members Meeting sessions and webinars, multiple **Program Evaluation Learning Community Calls and resources** highlighted ways in which organizations can measure and communicate their impact:

- [Going Beyond Bibliometrics: A system to track the progress and impact of biomedical research funded by Susan G Komen](#)
- [HRA Analyzer Lunch and Learn](#)
- [Utilizing Visualization for Program Evaluation Part 2: Practical strategies for effectively communicating evaluation findings](#)
- [Evaluation Tools for HRA Members \(compiled in 2023 by the Program Evaluation Community Co-Chairs\)](#)



HRA Analyzer

[HRA Analyzer](#) is HRA's real time, searchable database of awards made by HRA member organizations, hosted by Dimensions. Use HRA Analyzer to:

- Search for funding in specific research areas and categories
- Track individual grants by associated publications
- Visualize funding data from both HRA organizations and NIH

The quality of Analyzer depends on member organizations submitting data!

2023 HRA Member Grants

Statistics using data in HRA Analyzer

8,699

HRA member grants active in 2023

\$5.4B

Funding awarded for grants active in 2023

Data from 64 HRA member organizations

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2024

SAVE THE DATE: SPRING 2024 MEMBERS MEETING

To support the goal of facilitating accessible Members Meetings, the Spring Members Meeting will be all-virtual in 2024! We will host multiple sessions during the **week of March 11, 2024**, spread out over several days to minimize Zoom fatigue. In line with recommendations made by the Members Meeting Task Force, the Fall 2024 meeting will be hybrid (in-person, and live streamed virtually). We're grateful for the continued support of HRA Intern Mandy Westland in organizing the Members Meeting program!

PRIORITIES FOR 2024

- HRA will continue exploring ways to improve the culture of research by expanding on existing efforts (like those of the Research Workforce & Early Career Development and Misconduct & Ethics Learning Community)
- HRA will facilitate opportunities to learn how to leverage the power of AI to support grantmaking and advances in health research
- HRA will welcome a new Executive Director! After almost 10 years leading HRA, Maryrose is retiring this Spring.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful for support provided by member organizations above and beyond dues.



F O U N D A T I O N

DORIS DUKE
FOUNDATION



JAMES S. McDONNELL FOUNDATION



Thank you to those who serve on the [Board of Directors](#) and [learning community co-chairs](#).

51 EVENTS

Including Learning Community Calls, Members Meetings, Regional Meetings, and webinars.

78 SPEAKERS

Presented at HRA events, not including informal speakers at Open Mic-style events. These 78 unique speakers came from 54 unique organizations (25 HRA member organizations and 29 non-member organizations).

2000+ ATTENDEES

Across Learning Community Calls, HRA webinars, CEO Roundtables, Members Meetings, and Regional Meetings in 2023. Join us for an event in 2024!