Engaging with the Research Data Alliance

**The Value of the Research Data Alliance to Funding Agencies**

***The Research Data Alliance’s vision is Researchers and innovators openly sharing data across technologies, disciplines, and countries to address the grand challenges of society***

The Research Data Alliance (RDA) is a community-driven organization whose mission is to develop the social and technical data infrastructure needed to drive innovation surrounding data sharing and data interoperability.

Established in 2013, RDA supports more than 8,400 international members representing 137 countries, has generated 32 concrete outputs[[1]](#footnote-1) (eight of which are recognized as European ICT technical specifications) with over 95 documented adoption cases (May 2019).

The Research Data Alliance enables data to be shared across barriers through outputs developed by focused Working Groups and Interest Groups, formed of volunteer experts from around the world and drawn from academia, private sector and government. Participation in RDA is open to anyone who agrees to its guiding principles of openness, consensus, balance, harmonisation, with a community driven and non-profit approach.

RDA has a grass-roots, inclusive approach covering all data lifecycle stages, engaging data producers, users and stewards, addressing data curation, exchange, processing, storage, and preservation. It has succeeded in creating the neutral social platform where international research data experts meet to exchange views and to agree on topics including social hurdles on data sharing, education and training challenges, data management plans and certification of data repositories, disciplinary and interdisciplinary interoperability, as well as technological aspects of research data management.

The distinction between the two major components of the Alliance is important to explain as a preamble to the engagement possibilities.

* The **Work** of RDA is done by the volunteer community through self-formed, focused Working Groups and exploratory Interest Groups to build the social and technical connections or bridges.
* The **Business** of RDA is to support that community and facilitate the building and using of the bridges that enable open sharing of data.

There are thus a number of different ways for a funding agency to engage with the Research Data Alliance.

## WHY SHOULD FUNDING AGENCIES ENGAGE WITH RDA?

Agencies fund research to deliver benefit to their stakeholders – and this benefit is enhanced if the research is of **high quality**, and the results of that research **translate** to benefit to the stakeholders. In many studies, it has been shown that if the research data associated with the research is of high quality and in a form that can be used for new purposes, the value of research is increased.

Thus, engagement with RDA enables an agency to deliver to its stakeholders more value from its investment in research.

Funders can engage in a number of ways:

* By encouraging recipients of its grants to adopt the **recommendations and outputs** of the RDA, thereby increasing the value of recipients’ research outputs
* By encouraging recipients of its grants to participate in the **work** of RDA, thereby increasing the role of the recipients in shaping the nature of data sharing
* By supporting the **business** of RDA to maintain operational excellence
* By actively participating in the **RDA Funders forum**[[2]](#footnote-21019), meeting funding peers to discuss current issues of significance to research funders

The value of RDA to funders has a very high multiplier effect: through contributing to the business of RDA, the work of RDA can in turn contribute to the quality and translation value of nearly every grant holder and research infrastructure provider; and by directly engaging, funders are much more strongly engaged and connected internationally in a way that enhances the local value.

RDA enables funders to enable research competitiveness and visibility in the context of data sharing.

## what is the benefit to rda OF engaging with FUNDING AGENCIES?

RDA needs a professional and sustainable business in order to support the work of RDA. Funders can provide the resources to support this business and encourage grant holders to participate in the work of RDA.

## HOW CAN YOUR FUNDING ORGANISATION ENGAGE WITH RDA?

There are a series of different engagement mechanisms for an organisation to engage in the Research Data Alliance:

* Become a Funder of the Research Data Alliance by financially contributing to the RDA Foundation and supporting one or more of the many Business and / or Work activities. The cost of supporting the Work of RDA is outlined below.

## RDA SPONSOR & SUPPORTER OPTIONS

Any of the support / sponsorship programmes outlined below (or others proposed by funding agency itself) for the RDA community members can be funded / sponsored by an organisation and can be administered directly by the organisation, through close collaboration and an MoU with the RDA Foundation. Alternatively, the RDA Foundation can administer the programme directly on behalf of the organisation, with clear reference to and visibility for the supporter. In the latter case, the RDA Foundation would request an administrative overhead of 5-10% to be agreed directly with the organisation. Examples of such programmes include:

* Sponsorship of RDA Plenary Meetings
* Organisation of Research Data Meetings
* Support of Data Expert/Fellow/Early Career Programmes
* Test, Adopt and Implement Projects/Pilots
* Support of Travel to RDA Plenary Meetings
* Establishment of RDA Data Awards/Scholarships
* Organisation of RDA Training/Events

## *RDA PLENARY MEETING SPONSORSHIP*

The RDA Plenary meeting is the twice-annual meeting where RDA community members meet to discuss possible new topics, advance Working and Interest Group activities, and to conduct RDA business. These plenary meetings serve as important milestones in the life of Working and Interest Groups, especially in terms of achievements and outputs. Furthermore, the RDA coordination groups such as the Council, RDA Funders Forum, Technical Advisory board, Organisational Assembly, Organisational Advisory Board, Secretariat and other RDA committees also take advantage of these face-to-face opportunities to interact with members on the current state, progress, achievements, and future plans. Funders are invited to sponsor RDA plenary meetings. Different levels of sponsorship and corresponding visibility are outlined in the sponsorship packages issued by a Plenary’s local organisers. Details of past, upcoming and future plenaries are available online.[[3]](#footnote-2)

## *ORGANISing RESEARCH DATA MEETINGS*

In collaboration with RDA, other organisations for whom research data matters can support and run **high-level events** targeted to funders, research institutes, industry, etc. focused on specific topics of global interest and importance. RDA would be seen as an independent international forum for discussing and actioning these topics with organisations across the globe. The organisation could consider proposing a topic and sponsoring one of the events.

## *DATA EXPERT / FELLOW / Early Career programmes*

Organisations and funders have supported **data expert, fellow and early career programmes** in RDA in the past, with different durations and formats and financial contributions. All programme participants can showcase their data research activities at a Plenary meeting, in addition to other kinds of exposure to RDA members and groups. For instance, the RDA Europe early career programme specifically supports participation in RDA Plenary meetings by covering the costs (travel, subsistence, visa and registration fees). RDA US has run Fellow programmes using sponsors to support 3-6 month activities which run before and after a plenary meeting.

## *TESTING, ADOPTION & IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS / PILOTS*

There are many different formats of **pilot schemes and projects** that can be directly funded by organisations to enhance the take up and validation of the RDA outputs and recommendations. Some examples of projects to date include:

* RDA US Adoption Grants: financial support for project personnel to integrate RDA Recommendations into existing infrastructure environments. Budgets of at most $35,000 are envisaged.
* AGU / RDA US Enabling FAIR Data: a project funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation focusing on the practical implementation of RDA Outputs in Earth & Space sciences domain. Funding supports staff, travel and events.
* RDA EU Collaboration Projects: financial support for short term 3-6 months testing or adoption projects of RDA outputs in European organisations. Financial contribution of approx. €15.000 per project is foreseen with funding of approx. 15 projects over a period from May 2018 to March 2020.
* Australian National Data Service (ANDS): supported the definition, implementation and roll out of the practical and easy to use **23 Research data things programme**[[4]](#footnote-3) which is open to all anywhere in the world to customise and implement in their organisation. It is based on the RDA 23 Things: Libraries for Research Data output generated by the Libraries for Research Data Interest Group. Designed to build capability and a community of practice around research data management, the programme was targeted to librarian and research support staff, though it is open to all those interested in learning more about the subject from any part of the world.

## *RDA PLENARY MEETING TRAVEL SUPPORT*

Supporting the costs of RDA community members to attend RDA plenary meetings and do the work of RDA, advancing the developments and deliverables of Working and Interest Group . Organisations wishing to do this could, for instance, **open a call for expressions of interest** focusing on a specific topic, discipline, domain, technology, etc.

## *RDA data awards / scholarships*

Creation of **a programme to offer visibility and recognition to initiatives towards data excellence**. Possible awards could be for innovative implementation of RDA outputs in SMEs / industry or indeed for excellent research conducted using RDA outputs (or the ICT Technical Specifications = Standards). Scholarships could cover specific data science education in particular domains etc. An RDA Award or Scholarship programme would be sponsored by an organisation, with the management of the programme to be under the RDA Foundation and thus the Foundation receiving financial support for administrative aspects.

## *RDA TRAINING / EVENTS*

Creation of a **datathon, hackathon,** **training course or series of focused events** (including webinars), organised and supported by an organisation, where the core objective is to raise awareness of and increase impact of RDA activities and outputs.

1. RDA Outputs are the technical and social infrastructure solutions developed by RDA Working Groups or Interest Groups that enable data sharing, exchange, and interoperability. These Outputs have an important impact in two areas: solving problems, and incorporation and/or adoption in infrastructure environments by individuals, projects and organisations. RDA Outputs have the following classifications: 1. RDA Recommendations; 2. Supporting Outputs; 3. Other Outputs [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.rd-alliance.org/about-rda/governance/rda-funders-forum> [↑](#footnote-ref-21019)
3. https://rd-alliance.org/plenaries [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. http://www.ands.org.au/working-with-data/skills/23-research-data-things [↑](#footnote-ref-3)