

Strategy Planning Meeting Notes



September 19, 2013

Washington Marriott
Room Salon D
1221 22nd Street NW
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Meeting Overview

Attendees:

Council: Tony Hey, Patrick Cocquet, Fran Berman, Kay Raseroka, Doris Wedlich, Ross Wilkinson

Secretariat: Mark Parsons, Herman Stehouwer, Hilary Hanahoe, Stefanie Kethers

Technical Advisory Board (TAB): Beth Plale, Andrew Treloar, Francoise Genova

OAB: Juan Bicarregui, Leif Laaksonen, Larry Lannom, Walter Stewart

Meeting facilitation: Daron G Green

Apologies:

Bill Michener, John Wood, Jan Brase

Agenda:

- 08.30 Welcome, introductions and overview for the day
- 09.00 Strategy: Aspirational goal(s) and critical success factors
- 10.15 Summary
- 10.45 Break
- 11.00 Strategy: Audiences, influence and stakeholders
- 12.00 Summary
- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.15 Execution: Mechanisms, resources, mobilization and measures
- 14.15 Summary
- 14.45 Actions/next steps
- 15.15 Close
- 15.30 Depart

Goals

- Agree a high-level strategy and execution plan
- Attendees leave with a common understanding of what RDA is doing, how and when it will be successful and who is doing what in the next few weeks, months or years

Strategy: Aspirational goal(s) and critical success factors

The discussion explored the following questions:

- What are RDA's aspirational goals? (eg Which specific scenarios are most important to the RDA? What is different from today? What is newly enabled? What is easier/simpler?)
- Critical Success Factors: How/when will RDA know when it is successful? (e.g. To achieve the specific scenario: who is behaving/working differently? What will be in place? What new capabilities are available?)

To facilitate clarity, RDA's Vision and Mission statements were revisited to check that the RDA's leadership was comfortable with the currently-stated focus and goals for the organization.

Vision statement

Current RDA Vision Statement:

"Over the next decade, research data will be interoperable world-wide. Open exchange of data will be routinely occurring among researchers, disciplines, governments, citizens, and the private sector. International movement of research data will be as seamless as email transmission or international telephone calls are today."

It was agreed that a shorter and more focused statement would be beneficial. After some iteration and discussion the team formulated the following:

"Researchers and innovators openly share data across technologies, disciplines, and countries to address the grand challenges of society".

Action/Responsibility 1. Walter Stewart to convene small group to further iterate vision statement and report back to RDA Council for review.

Mission Statement

Current RDA Mission Statement

"Research data are arguably the world's greatest significantly untapped resource. Research data have the capacity to engender insights that will lead to whole new products, services, and solutions to a wide range of the world's grand challenge problems will become the basis of new economic systems. While research data have the capacity to transform the world; the world lacks the infrastructure and practices to realize the benefits of that capacity. Useful free flow of data is currently not possible – not for the absence of networks or computation, but for the absence of agreed global exchange systems with trained data professionals working with standards and accepted processes for the collection, storage, access, and preservation of research data.

The Research Data Alliance is an international collaboration to build global exchange systems for research data so that unlocking its value becomes a truly global enterprise."

Suggested modification:

"RDA rapidly builds the social and technical bridges that enable open sharing of data."

- **Action/Responsibility 2.** Walter Stewart to convene small group to further iterate vision statement and report back to RDA Council for review.

Aspirational Goals and Critical Success Factors

Given the revised Vision and Mission statement, the discussion then focused on what Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and milestones would be required to ensure RDA was delivering against its stated purpose. These are summarized as follows:

	Within 1-2 years	2-5 years	5 years+
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure ‘hard outputs’ from WGs see adoption (primarily initially amongst WG participants) ▪ Update design of plenary and WGs sessions to support RDA’s and its members’ evolving needs ▪ Ensure bridging between WGs to share learnings and increase cross-discipline collaboration/interaction ▪ Map barriers to open data services. Provide a gap analysis to inform future actions/recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broader adoption of WGs outputs (examples are: data becomes available and is accessed outside WG participants, RDA-enabled data access and cited in research publications) ▪ Global Research Council engagement ▪ Bridging between WGs continues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of RDA data/APIs is commonplace amongst researchers and referenced by funding agencies and in research publications ▪ Measure of impact of RDA in terms of job creation, new businesses and scientific breakthroughs ▪ Professional recognition for data sharing. Increase in the number of courses for data scientists/researchers, valued in universities and by funding agencies
RDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Secure long-term funding ▪ Establish rigorous marketing and communications plan ▪ Story development (eg data citation, wheat genome and toxico-genomics) ▪ Drive up RDA participation and diversity ▪ Create liaison with other similar organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Harvest and disseminate success stories from RDA + demo ▪ International funding participation (with some explicit recognition of the need for both national and international agency investment). 	

Strategy: Audiences, influence and stakeholders

The discussion identified three broad stakeholder groups:

- Funding bodies, governmental organizations and R&D agencies;
- Industry;
- Academia.

Meeting participants divided across these three to explore and reported back their observations and recommendations on the following issues:

- What do we need to do with <stakeholder> and in what timescale?
- What is the timescale for success for <stakeholder> and, if this is many years away, what might be candidate interim milestones/measures of progress with/for these stakeholders?
- Why is the RDA uniquely positioned to do drive this field/domain?

The stakeholder group reports are given below. Note: these discussions provide important input to both the Secretary General's role/duties and give essential context for the marketing and communication plan.

Funding bodies, governmental organizations and R&D agencies

What do we need to do with them and in what time scale?

- There should be tuned messaging for government and funding agencies that needs to be customized for the power structures in differing jurisdictions.
- RDA needs to work closely with RDAC to ensure consistent messaging and stakeholder management. This having been noted, the RDA needs to be engaging at scale with federal and state as well as supranational organizations such as the European Commission. Staying co-ordinated in the timing and content of these stakeholder communications will be an important part of the Secretary General and Marketing/Communications functions.
- RDA will need to find a way to 'borrow the gravitas' from its participants and members. This will allow it to gain influence beyond the credibility of its leadership team.
- RDA needs to recognize and tune to the fact that the plenaries must demonstrate success to its funders and have opportunities for these successes to be appropriately highlighted in the course of the agenda.
- Similarly, it needs also to demonstrate a vigor and growth of engagement worldwide and year-on-year.
- RDA's role is to present arguments to RDAC/funding agencies which they will massage and use with government agencies. Examples of this being:
 - Important to partner with the best in the world – data is a medium for partnership

- Future proofing your own data investments by interacting with others – avoid being BETA – leveraging the investments of others. Influencing what is happening internationally to ensure local needs are met.
- Engagement with RDA will make national research efforts be more competitive.
- Focus on preserving the data investment
- Future jobs – data is an area for new employment
- Multiple agencies need to be approached; we need to diversify – e.g. in the US NSF is important but DOE, NIH, DARPA, etc. are important too.
- RDA should be proactive in defining the metrics of success for RDA engagement – be clear on the measures to better manage stakeholder expectations.

RDA needs funding agencies to build the values/principles of open access to data into the research environment in each jurisdiction; e.g. data dissemination/management plans that are consistent with RDA values become prerequisites for research funding.

What is the timescale for success for them and, if this is many years away what might be candidate interim milestones/measures of progress with/for these stakeholders?

This is a ten-year effort to transform the way data is available and used in global discovery in response to opportunities created by data-based research.

Why is the RDA uniquely positioned to do drive this field/domain?

1. RDA provides a mechanism for countries to ensure data dissemination and data impact.
2. Transforms the value of infrastructure
3. RDA is independent of government and domains – multiple domains involved
4. RDA can respond quickly to policy changes in research agencies e.g. emerging government policy commitments to open data.*
5. RDA leverages volunteer labour several orders of magnitude greater in value than the investment required to sustain RDA.
6. RDA will drive open sharing of data enabling interdisciplinary efforts to address grand challenge/transformational research issues.*

* Items 4 and 6 were identified as the most compelling/unique value propositions for these stakeholders. It was also noted that it was perhaps the union of all these that helped define RDA's unique overall position.

Industry

Discussion was guided by national open access directives, such as the recent OSTP policy in the US, whereby data sets are made and kept open. Economic arguments for open access to data have been made in partial justification for the directives.

What is RDA's value proposition to industry? The discussion segmented industry into two potential audience segments: Large enterprises (>500 employees) and small to mid-sized enterprises (10-500 employees).

Recommend RDA develops its conversation with industry in terms of stability/sustainability of data access. More specifically, funding organizations invest in the production of data; these organizations also fund RDA to help promote the sharing of this data. The RDA is therefore of value to industry as it helps create the context for higher-level business services and value-propositions to be created on top of RDA-enable data research products/services. Industry should push governments for publicly-funded research data to be subject to RDA-access APIs, licensing and principles.

Large enterprises:

It was noted that some industry standardization around Resource Description Framework (RDF) and OData has begun.

For large technology companies (eg Amazon, Google, Microsoft) it was noted that:

- There was a potential value proposition around accessing/mining a large scale of heterogeneous data through RDA mechanisms/APIs. This concept was discarded as RDA has little to advise/add to the scale and complexity of these particular companies that are already actively handling. Moreover, the RDA's focus on research/scientific data has already proven to be less interesting to these companies.
- The potential value proposition relating to RDA helping provide a platform for distributed data sharing was also discarded due to the need of large corporations to have stable/production-quality platforms. This would necessitate research platforms being seen as trustworthy and cost-effective and with robust service level agreements.

For global telecommunications companies:

- RDA could be seen as attractive because it facilitates the globalization and scale of data transfer.

Small to medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

RDA could develop “defacto standard” open interfaces to access the emerging volumes of open data. RDA guarantees, through some mechanism, that the interface (API) stays open and through RDA's credibility becomes the standardized way of providing access to open datasets. These open interfaces to data, along with sustainability of RDA as organization, could provide enough assurance to SME's to be seen as a business opportunity to develop value-add services on top of the interfaces.

What SME's would find this value proposition interesting? Those emerging in areas like e-health, smart cities, and energy that are inherently drawing on scientific data and from multiple sources.

The timeline for SME engagement would be problematic. It is common that SME's have a 3 month timeframe from discovery of a tool and enacting as part of a service. They are unlikely to have the patience to engage over a long period.

Academia (Researchers, Data Scientists, Infrastructure Providers, Research Institutions)

What do we need to do with them and in what time scale?

The discussion identified two categories of researcher/scientists: data scientists (including data parctitioners) and domain researchers. These are discussion in turn.

Data scientists (and data practitioners):

- RDA needs to convene people actively engaged in data science to help agree approaches, standards and leading practices. This is happening now and will be a continued area of activity/investment for RDA for the foreseeable future.
- The intent is to help define their role, raise their visibility, and empower them. Again, this is a current activity for RDA and likely for the next 3-5 years.
- Encourage them to adopt/explore RDA methods, APIs and data services. Timing: 1+ years.

Domain Researchers (as influenced by their institutions, professional societies, and funders) noting that the time scale will vary significantly depending on discipline. In many cases the time to engage is now but with the recognition that the timeframe for acceptance/recognition is likely to be longer for than that of the data scientists/research.

- Need to engage in domain-specific events/conferences and educate them about RDA, its activities and the value of open access to data.
- Important to listen to their issues and tease out their data problems.
- Identify champions in their community who can help advocate data sharing and RDA.
- Encourage them to employ data scientists/researchers if they haven't already and get them to send their representatives to RDA.
- Share with them the successes of RDA and why it's relevant to them. Compile a portfolio of success stories.
- Encourage them to adopt RDA outputs (albeit at a level above the adoption by data scientists/researchers).

What is the timescale for success for them and, if this is many years away what might be candidate interim milestones/measures of progress with/for these stakeholders?

- Essentially this is 'now and very soon' recognizing that some discipline researchers already believe in the value of RDA's approach.
- Note that for some areas of science this may take a generation to address (although clearly some areas of research will be faster). It will take many years and multiple factors to have data sharing and recognition of data science as a profession be integral to research as a mainstream attitude.

What is the RDA uniquely positioned to do/drive this field/domain?

- Serendipity: RDA is in the right place at the right time. There is a convergence of opinion that data sharing is important and it must be addressed now.
- Funders are paying close attention to RDA. They have high expectations and they are investing in the vision that RDA has painted. It is important to take advantage of this opportunity while the funders are engaged.
- RDA is actively helping address interdisciplinary problems.

- RDA is focused on rapid action – in contrast to some other bodies its intent is to get agreements in place and quickly move to actual instantiations of its defined APIs/protocols.
- RDA provides a unique opportunity to meet, collaborate with, and learn from some of the top experts and influencers in the field.

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Execution: Mechanisms, resources, mobilization and measure

Structure and Actions:

General actions:

Action/Responsibility 3. In lieu of Secretary General being in place, Fran Berman, Ross to discuss cadence of RDA Council meetings and rhythm of engagement with Secretariat, RDAC etc.

RDAC

Action/Responsibility 4. Collaborate with Council to agree year 3-4 check-point for RDA including, metrics and review.

RDA's National/Regional Groups:

Action/Responsibility 5. Work with Secretariat/Secretary General to deliver plenary event.

Action/Responsibility 6. Give feedback on events, marketing and communications materials and help message in-region/country.

Council:

Action/Responsibility 7. Review revised Vision and Mission. Iterate, accept and communicate revised statements to Secretariat for broader dissemination.

Action/Responsibility 8. Consider prioritizing recruitment of a social scientist for the remaining Council position.

Action/Responsibility 9. Council to recruit Secretary General and include in their job function operational responsibility, communications, reporting, risk register and stakeholder management (see Secretary General actions/responsibilities below).

Action/Responsibility 10. Define RDA's Intellectual Property position – in particular in relation to the outputs of the Working Group.

Action/Responsibility 11. Work with RDAC to ensure future funding for RDA.

Secretariat:

Action/Responsibility 12. Define process for orchestrating/coordinating plenary events – more specifically, decisions over the design and location of the event. Ensure feedback from previous events, suggested improvements/adjustments are captured and incorporated in future event. Communicate these learnings in advance to prospective national/regional hosts.

Action/Responsibility 13. Provide functions of Secretary General until such a position is filled.

Secretary General:

Action/Responsibility 14. Once in position the Secretary General it is recommended that they be responsible for:

- Coordination of all RDA operations;
- Ensuring information flow around the various RDA sub-groups Council, RDAC, OAB, WGs, TAB etc.
- Reporting = to RDA Council on RDA recruitment, marketing, communications and activity schedule;
- Maintaining risk register and mitigation recommendations/actions;
- Working with TAB to monitor progress in WGs;
- Define current 'baseline' of current data access practices and activities to help document RDA's impact year-on-year (in collaboration with TAB).
- Work with one or more regional RDA organization(s) to conduct a job impact analysis (activity done in collaboration with OAB).
- Managing overall marketing and communications activities including: defining a marketing plan which encompasses both global and regional requirements and considers the various stakeholder groups. Harvesting success stories and creation of stakeholder-specific stories/talking points. Work with Secretariat to staff/resource the marketing plan accordingly.

Action/Responsibility 15. Work with RDAC to ensure future funding for RDA.

TAB

Action/Responsibility 16. Give guidance to Working Groups on form of technical specifications/outputs.

Action/Responsibility 17. On an ongoing basis, bridge between different Working Groups to identified synergies, connections and share leading practices.

Action/Responsibility 18. Identify barriers and technical gaps in current activities and Working Group decisions. Report back to Council on recommendations for future activities/investments to address these gaps. Work with OAB to help correlate with social issues/barriers.

OAB

Action/Responsibility 19. Lead defining Social barriers/gaps that might impede RDA's Vision/Mission working closely with TAB to make unified view of recommendations to Council. Make recommendations on social interaction/approaches to help encourage open data access policies and data sharing.

Risks

Although not discussed in detail during the meeting, the following four areas appear as potential derailment factors for RDA and it is recommended that the Council actively engage in discussions as to how they may be mitigated.

Organizational complexity – RDA’s organizational structure includes a number of distinct units/subgroups. These include: RDAC, the RDA Council, the TAB, the Secretariat, the OAB, WGs, National RDA organizations and the broader membership. Maintaining clarity of purpose, agreement on decision making and consistency of dialogue with participants and stakeholders will be a challenge unless clear and efficient lines of communication are established. The RDA is therefore encouraged to focus on a small number of key meetings/calls, orchestrated by the Secretariat (and then the Secretary General’s office), to drive forward its key conversations and coordinate stakeholder interactions.

Intellectual Property – the RDA will soon begin to create assets associated with API’s for data access, data transfer, data manipulation and data sharing. Currently this is a very active area for litigation with many well-funded organizations seeking to pursue aggressive policies for monetizing existing patent portfolios. The RDA should quickly put in place its own policies and procedures for defining intellectual property and how/whether it wishes to establish (or disrupt) the IP creation process in the areas in which it chooses to be active.

Stakeholders Perception – the RDA has a large number of stakeholders. It will be important that the RDA identify which are key to its long-term success and ensure that its events, communications and messaging adequately convey value and increasing momentum over the coming month/years.

Secretary General – filling this position will be critical to the RDA’s long-term success as this role must coordinate across a disparate set of volunteers both in terms of the technical work AND in terms of positioning and messaging to very differing stakeholder groups. Given this, the RDA is encouraged to seek a very high-caliber person with a track record of successful organizational execution AND good interpersonal communication skills. Although there is a strong need for this post to be filled quickly, it is recommended that time be taken to find the best candidate for the long-term delivery of the Vision/Mission.