Research Data Alliance
22nd Plenary Meeting, 14-23 May 2024, Virtual Feedback Analysis

The RDA Secretariat has thoroughly analysed the survey feedback collected from the Research Data Alliance's 22nd Plenary Meeting held virtually from May 14-23, 2024. This document presents the analysis, key considerations, and concrete actions to enhance future plenaries.

The feedback analysis was collected by the RDA from the official RDA P22 participant / speaker survey feedback, the RDA community members (via email and verbally), and the RDA Secretariat’s self analysis. Attendee and Speaker/Organiser feedback analysis are listed.

RDA P22 Attendee Survey Framework

1. Post-RDA P22 Survey Format
RDA P22 was attended by 511 online participants. The RDA P22 survey was open for two weeks after the plenary ended. A total of 61 attendees responded to the survey, approximately 12% of the total number of attendees.

Consideration (s):
- Two end-of-P22 surveys were made available to target session organisers/speakers and attendees separately. Surveys included between 12 and 16 questions each requiring approximately 10-15 minutes response time.
- Surveys provided an explanation of how participants’ answers could assist the event planners going forward; certain questions were customised and optional.
- Both surveys were distributed during the closing plenary session, and they were open for two weeks. A couple of reminders were sent out to complete surveys.
- For a variety of reasons, opening the survey at the end of the plenary decreases the number of interested parties.

Action (s):
- Limit the time required to complete the survey to no more than ten minutes.
- Share questions via Menti during the closing session
- Distribute a QR code with a survey throughout the plenary

2. First-timer Attendees
If VP22 was your first plenary - did you attend the Newcomers Session? How useful was it?

Direct quotes from the responses:
However, adding web to agenda, and with programme suitable Whova global time slot, sessions. Consideration like the pages)

“Signed had was the was” It would be beneficial to many. However, it was good to be given an overview.”

“I found its friendly nature very encouraging.”

Consideration (s):

- 22% of the respondents attended one of the newcomers sessions and 100% of them would attend another plenary.
- The session was held in an informal format and without powerpoint presentations. The content was based on the attendees' interests.

Action (s):

- Supplement the newcomers document with information on the newcomers sessions.
- Two sessions for newcomers are scheduled on:
  - Online sessions on 22 October 07:00 UTC and 17:00 UTC
  - In-person session with remote participation on 13 November at 22:15 UTC
- Attendees will be asked what questions they have, and the content will be prepared according to their interests.

3. Plenary Navigation

Did you find it easy to navigate the plenary?

Some direct quotes of the respondents:

- “Yes, "my agenda" option on Whova helped me organise.”
- “I was overwhelmed with the number of WGs/IGs as well as community boards, but it was a pleasure to see the geniality of the RDA community.”
- “The web programme provided a great overview, but the Agenda in Whova is not very convenient to use.”
- “It’s much easier to navigate the schedule on Whova than on the RDA website.”
- “Information about when would repeats be on the page of a session would be helpful.”
- “The only annoying thing was to follow links from the agenda, to the description, a link to open the RDA site. It would be good to directly have an agenda in the Whova.”
- “It was not easy on the small phone screen. It was hard to find my agenda and some of the sessions I signed up to had disappeared or ran at different times than I had noted.”
- “The session descriptions (proposal pages) should be updated to include times of the approved sessions, like "add to my agenda" Whova link.”

Consideration (s):

- The plenary programme schedule is very complex (up to 8 parallel sessions held in one breakout slot, long days, global time zones). Whova offers a couple of programme templates and the most suitable is always selected.
- A link to a session proposal with descriptions, agenda, and listed speakers is always available.
- Adding confirmed session times to session proposal web pages would be beneficial to many. However, manually adding details to 60+ sessions and updating them according to changes is laborious for organisers.
Action (s):
- The web platform programme is a current subject of improvement with the RDA web developers.
- A new field 'short description of your session' was added to the P23 session submission form. This should improve the overview of sessions once added under each programme element.

4. Networking
Did you take advantage of networking and informal discussion opportunities during the plenary?

Direct quotes of the respondents:

- “I found that much of the "social area discussions" in Whova was off-topic and rather useless from a serious information exchange point of view.”
- “I found a networking session more useful and enjoyable than I expected. Session discussions are difficult to join, as I am new to the field and have little to contribute.”
- “Useful contacts have been established.”
- “I loved that flexibility and it encouraged me to attend presentations on subjects I would not otherwise have learnt about. “
- “Please cut on cute cat pictures, it isn't what a plenary should be.”
- “Social sessions like the office hours maybe need some structured content as nobody is willing to bring their own topics.”
- “The regional RDA gatherings were a good networking opportunity.”

Consideration (s):
- 32% of respondents didn’t have an opportunity to get involved in scheduled networking due to a different time zone, lack of time or opportunity.
- Whova allows each attendee to create a topic of discussion. The P22 organisers overview topics to control content not-relevant to the plenary.
- RDA Secretariat checks the community area to ensure that there is no inappropriate content that is not in line with the RDA code of conduct. Furthermore, content of marginal relevance to the plenary meeting but of interest to the attendees and valuable for networking and online interaction are encouraged.

Action (s):
- Promote the purpose of plenary sessions with attendees, as many have different expectations.
- Decision on ‘Pet corner’, the second most popular topic after ‘Ask organisers anything’ was set up by a community member, to remain if created by members in the future.

5. Pathways
Did you use the plenary pathways (programme navigation) and did you find it useful?
43% of respondents found pathways useful and 25% did not know about them.

Direct quotes of the respondents:
- “Too difficult to navigate different icons and colours, and I learned too late that there were tables on the RDA website grouping sessions per pathways.”
- “Not useful. I navigated the programme by time / groups I follow (32% respondents)”
- “My problem was reading pathways, as the design and letters are not eye friendly.”
Consideration (s):
- Many traditional conferences group sessions in the programme per pathways/topics of interest. That way, pathways are clearly visible. Plenary sessions have a complex programme schedule which is built based on group conflicts/time zones preferences. Pathways are often missed.

Action (s):
- Promote confirmed sessions per each pathway to all attendees prior to plenaries
- Make announcements on how to filter the programme by pathways / tracks in Whova

6. If you were unsatisfied with the choice of sessions in your time zone please tell us why.

78% of respondents found a choice of session time zones suitable, whereas 22% didn’t.

Direct quotes of the respondents:
- “Too many sessions in the same time slot, and it would have been better to access more than one session in the same time slot. Recorded videos are available, but I’d rather dedicate the whole day to the plenary session.”
- “Frustrated that the selection of time zones was limited to 3 options, which I’m sure made scheduling difficult on the organisers.”
- “Please hold any repeat sessions at different time slots.”

Consideration (s):
- Three time zones covered all global time zones, so everyone, despite where they are, could attend.
- The layout of Plenary is based on simultaneous sessions because group interest is very high. Simultaneous sessions vary but do not exceed eight.

Action (s):
- Keep the same programme layout (breakout sessions) for the future plenaries.
- Recordings are available for those who miss them

7. Do you like the length (6 days) and spread (2 weeks) of the Virtual Plenary?

92% of respondents found the VP22 length suitable.

If the plenary duration didn't suit you, what changes would you make?

Direct quotes of the respondents:
- “UK time zone sessions were all during school drop off and pick up, so I missed a lot.”
- “2 weeks with the repeat sessions was extremely useful. Recordings are useful but not the same.”
- “It is too compressed, with too many parallel sessions in the breakout session time slots. If we are 100% virtual, why not schedule over 3 weeks?”
- “Too long. With recordings available, I’d prefer fewer repeats and a shorter plenary.”
- “It went by super fast. I could easily participate for another week.”
Consideration:

- Organisers take major global public holidays into consideration to select dates for a plenary. The scheduling of the sessions ensured that at least two friendly time zones were covered across the globe.
- Sessions with long gaps between and with six days spread over two weeks allowed an opportunity to attend the plenary and focus on daily routine (work, etc.)
- Scheduling a plenary programme is very complex. It is based on group conflicts/time zones preferences. Therefore, some repeat sessions can’t be scheduled in the same time zone.

Action:

- As a part of the RDA Secretariat's plenary analysis presented to the RDA Council members, it was confirmed that future virtual plenary meetings will be reduced from two weeks to one.

8. Please provide any other feedback, ideas or suggestions for improving the RDA Plenaries and your experience.

Direct quotes of the respondents:

- “Repeat sessions should not take place at the same times (i.e 07:00 UTC in week 1 and 07:00 UTC in week 2) to allow for people to join from multiple time zones.
  - 22:30 UTC time slot is not very useful - sessions in that time slot tended to be repeat and had very few participants. That time is unsuitable for Asia and parts of Australia, it would be evening for large parts of the Americas, which might explain why not many people joined.”
  - +4 more similar feedback received

Consideration:

- “It was a terrific plenary, and wonderfully planned! Two-week structure worked perfectly, as it allowed me to attend sessions as well as continue keeping up with my work.”
- “I am severely visually impaired and the conference system has problems in web accessibility, which prevents me from participating smoothly. I understand that it is not easy to improve, but I regret that FAIR does not extend to people with disabilities.”
- “Many sessions were cancelled. It was 3 out of 9 for me. Some of the chairs were in other sessions at the same time.
  - One session I was in was cancelled 10 minutes in. It turned out they were presenting in another session.
- “Descriptions of some sessions said that they are relevant for researchers, but were in fact not. The chairs did not acknowledge anyone other than data stewards/librarians, so I eventually left the session. A few of the repeat sessions were cancelled and I was counting on them; it would be good to provide a reason on why that was done (e.g. were the chairs unavailable or there wasn’t enough interest).”
- “It would be great if a draft programme could be shared with session chairs ahead of publication to the wider community so we can swap times.”
- “Plenaries are indispensable milestones to maintain the momentum in the group activities and for the RDA community to maintain and develop its interest and participation in the RDA.”
- “A recommendation would be to have simultaneous translation for the LA community, the English accents are a bit complex.”
• Sessions were cancelled last-minute by no show or chairs being unavailable. These are Birds of a Feather sessions where only one presenter was available. Organisers were not informed about any last-minute cancellations.
• Each P22 programme time slot covered a minimum of 2 friendly time zones. 22:30 UTC accommodated early-to-mid-morning in Australia, Northern Asia, afternoon in the Western Americas, and early evening in the Eastern Americas.
• A draft programme is always shared with session chairs first. Up to 3 weeks is given to request any programme changes. Communication with session chairs for the first time was launched at VP22.
• The P22 registration did not include a question about any accessibility requirements attendees might have. Zoom was integrated into Whova and was opened in a new window which might have caused issues for a visually impaired attendee.
• Providing a simultaneous translation for all sessions in different languages is very costly.

**Action (s):**

- Sessions cancellation policy is on the Secretariat/TAB agenda of discussion.
- Any session cancellations will be announced and as an addition, a reason for the cancellation will be given.
- An additional field asking if organisers need to be aware of any accessibility requirements is already added to the 23rd Plenary registration. Organisers will monitor each request on an individual basis.
- Promote the benefits of using Zoom’s free multilingual subtitle feature during sessions.
- The RDA is setting up a taskforce on accessibility together with the RDA Secretariat and the EU office

**RDA P22 Session Chairs/Speakers Survey Framework**

1. **Did you receive enough support from the tech staff during your session?**

   99% of responded session chairs received enough support.

   Direct quotes of the respondents:
   - "Tech support was very helpful and supportive. No improvements needed."
   - "I could not join the session early to test my setup. When I joined, I was abruptly criticised by the support person for not joining early. The same support person mis-clicked and moved me out of a breakout room, which led to disruption. My session was one of the first ones, and the experience soured my enthusiasm."

**Consideration(s):**

   Whova was set differently to previous plenaries and therefore did not let session speakers enter Zoom 25 minutes before the start. The issue was addressed and immediate access given.

**Action (s):**

- Continue providing a high level of support for session chairs/speakers to help them in planning their sessions.

2. **How did you feel about the duration of your virtual session? Is 90 minutes the right length or would 60 minutes work better?**
According to 87% of surveyed session chairs, 90-minute sessions are ideal and they would prefer not to reduce them. The remaining 13% of respondents felt 60-minutes would work better for virtual plenaries.

Direct quotes of the respondents:
- “90 is definitely the right length. 60 minutes would be too short.”
- “I attend another conference that has 60-min BoF sessions, and they are too short to get any real work done.”
- “90 min allows actual conversations to break out.”
- “Given purely virtual, some seemed a bit long with 90 minutes and not that many participants.”
- “90 is too long, but in the end, there is always plenty of discussion that is relevant, rich and moves the topics forward!”
- “60 works better for virtual sessions - harder to keep energy levels high.”

Consideration(s):
- Plenary meetings are working meetings where 90 minutes are given for discussion and audience networking.

Action(s):
- None applicable.

3. If you did have a repeat session, did you think it was necessary (considering the fact that the recordings were available 24h after your initial session)?

Only 33% of respondent group chairs held a repeat session and 67% didn't.

Direct quotes of the respondents:
- “Not that many people showed up to the repeat session, but it's hard to know whether the recordings of the first session had an impact on that.”
- “Yes, in our case very important for America and Asia, respectively.”
- “I co-chaired two sessions. It had advantages and disadvantages. It was hard to have all speakers available in two sessions, and I had to play a recording in a repeat session. I find a repeat reached to more RDA members from different geo-locations.”
- “I had a repeat session in all of the sessions I chaired. They were unfortunately scheduled for the same time slot in each case. This was due to only being able to choose 3 time options in the application.”
- “Yes because it enables more people to participate if they are interested and it is a more inclusive option.”
- “I chaired a repeat session but it had only 5 attendees. This was 23:30-01:00 my time so not ideal. Some people may have found the recording useful. I don't see the point of a repeat session if not many people turn up and the recording is available.”
- “We chose not to repeat as it was a lot to commit to when recordings are available.”

Consideration(s):
- Due to the programme complexity, the high number of sessions, and the many elements considered during the application and scheduling processes, some original and repeat sessions will clash.
- There is no data to trace who watched the recordings and when in order to evaluate how it affected low attendance on repeat sessions.
4. As a session chair, what is the biggest challenge in holding a virtual plenary session?

- Getting the audience involved/engaged - 36%
- Get all speakers and co-chairs in the same time zone - 25%
- Holding sessions in the unfriendly time zone - 24%
- Encouraging speakers to pay registration fees to join sessions - 15%
- Arranging speakers logistics, getting them to confirm, sorting out challenges when they don't realise they have to register to attend.
- Not knowing in advance how many people are likely to attend the session.

Consideration(s):

- The RDA is a global organisation. In 2024 we are focusing on the Global South, therefore, P22 aims to cover all global participants. Accommodating all time zones remains the biggest challenge.
- Sometimes attendees are not engaged for various reasons. P22 organisers produced recommendations for session chairs where tips of engagement audiences were listed.
- Even though Whova allows you to add a session of interest in a personal calendar, it is unknown how many attendees will join a session beforehand.

Action(s):

- The RDA Secretariat will continue taking all feedback into consideration and look for innovative ideas to improve future plenaries.

5. Please provide any other feedback, ideas or suggestions for improving the RDA plenaries and your experience.

Direct quotes of the respondents:

- “Some info from organisers to justify registration cost would be positive and would help make the case to Group members/invited presenters to pay easier.”
- “I liked the Plenary a lot. I know the challenges for the Secretariat which had to hold the Plenary for two weeks across all time zones in addition to the hard work with the web site. We need to have two Plenaries per year for keeping the Group momentum and community engagement in the RDA. THANK YOU!”
- “More integration between the documentation management (now somebody’s Google Drive?) used for the session notes and the RDA website itself. Some content of session notes will remain very useful long after the conclusion of the Plenary. It would have been good to know in advance about the “TAB meets chairs” session, I only learned about this by chance.”
- “In general virtual conferences are difficult to fully engage with. No magic way to improve this.”

Consideration(s):

- Whova is a platform that RDA has used since P18 (2021) and the community is familiar with it. It has an excellent price/quality ratio and offers a series of valuable features and functionalities (e.g. networking, integrated registration).
All P22 programme sessions (incl. Networking, TAB meets chairs, co-located events) were included on the web and Whova’s programme. Whova announcements were made 60-30 minutes prior to each session.

Collaborative notes are created, shared, and available via the RDA Google Drive. These are linked to the web programme and remain accessible to everyone all the time. If notes were to be created on the website, only RDA members logged in with active accounts would be able to access them.

The introduction of one-day registration tickets is not effective since the RDA’s effort for managing tickets manually via Whova platform is complicated, laborious and time-consuming.

Organisers aim to make fees as cost effective as possible. Plenaries cannot be offered for free since organising them involves costs. P22 registration costs were low. Many resources, including the web platform, stated that all speakers must be registered to participate and the cost breakdown was explained.

**Actions (s):**
- Analyse the current registration policy based on the community feedback.
- Collaborative notes will remain created as Google documents.