

# Research Data Alliance

## 26th Plenary Meeting (RDA VP26)

### Feedback Analysis Report

16–20 March 2026 • Fully Virtual

This report analyses feedback collected from the Research Data Alliance 26th Plenary Meeting (RDA VP26) participant and session chairs surveys. It presents key findings, direct quotes from attendees, organisers' notes on the feedback received, and recommended actions.

## RDA VP26 in Numbers

The infographic below provides an overview of key statistics for RDA VP26, including participant numbers, geographical and programme breakdowns.

RDA VP26 welcomed 316 attendees. Participation from Africa, Asia, and Oceania remains steady but low. Europe remains the largest region, followed by the Americas.



## Survey Response Numbers

Two surveys were distributed to attendees after RDA VP26: one for all participants and one for session chairs.

The surveys used the RDA's website-integrated form tool introduced at the RDA 24th Plenary (April 2025). Each survey included 7 questions with an estimated completion time of under 5 minutes. A total of 33 respondents provided feedback, representing a 10% response rate of the 316 registered attendees. This is slightly lower than the 12% recorded at RDA VP24 (April 2025). In-person plenaries tend to attract higher response rates, RDA P25 (part of IDW 2025, October 2025) received a 21% response rate.

## Overall Delegate Feedback

At the end of RDA VP26, participants were asked how they felt about the plenary. Most responded that they were satisfied or inspired, with only a small number feeling the plenary did not meet their expectations.

Those who expected more highlighted a wish for a wider range of programme disciplines, more interactive sessions, and time zones conflicts. Useful feedback for future virtual plenaries.

Session chairs reported very positive feedback: the vast majority described themselves as satisfied or inspired, with strong appreciation for organisational support and the pre-session planning updates.



### Direct quotes from participants:

*"I think for a virtual worldwide plenary, this was organised about as perfect as it could be."*

*"We need this global collaboration now more than ever."*

## First-Time and Returning Attendees

Around 13% of RDA VP26 attendees joined an RDA plenary for the first time, a similar proportion to RDA VP24 (April 2025), showing that RDA plenaries continue to attract new members from around the world.

### ★ NEW AT VP26 ★

For the first time, **newcomer-focused sessions** were open to all new RDA members, not just those registered for the plenary. Around **50 new RDA members** who were not attending the plenary joined these sessions. As new members join the RDA throughout the year, this pilot aimed to give them an early opportunity to learn about the organisation and ask questions. Both sessions were held in two time zones on the first day of the plenary and were well-attended.

Some newcomers, those attending working and interest group sessions, found the RDA overwhelming:

*"For a newbie, RDA is really quite overwhelming, with so many interest and working groups and people who have knowledge I don't have."*

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

→ Invite non-plenary attendees for newcomers sessions at virtual plenaries.

- Add a brief 'session type explainer' to the programme to help new participants navigate session types (WG, IG, BoF).
- Promote plenary pathways to newcomers to help them find relevant sessions.

## Networking and Community Connection

Networking remains one of the most valued and most challenging elements of a virtual plenary. The RDA VP26 offered several mechanisms for connection, including two 'Meet Your Match' sessions introduced at RDA VP24 (2025) for the first time. Two sessions were spread across the programme to randomly match participants in small groups to find commonalities and build new connections.

### How well did the RDA VP26 help you connect?

| Response                                                          | Participants % | Session Chairs % |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Perfectly and/or pretty well, found exactly who and what I needed | 60%            | 80%              |
| Somewhat, it was harder than expected                             | 40%            | 20%              |

The 'Meet Your Match' paired networking sessions received consistently **strong feedback** for the second plenary in a row. Multiple attendees called it a **highlight**:

*"I did appreciate the short networking session Meet Your Match! It was just the right duration to not get awkward but still speak to a few colleagues around the world."*

### ★ NEW AT VP26 ★

A new pilot was introduced at RDA VP26: **Watch-Along Sessions**, organised by **RDA regional groups**. The concept brought RDA members in person at their local locations to watch VP26 together, network with local peers, and engage with the global discussions from their own region. Three RDA regional partners participated: DANS in the Netherlands, UCDC in the USA, and ARDC in Australia. The RDA US watch-along session in Washington DC was cited as a model worth scaling:

*"The virtual plenaries are much smaller and disjointed but the watch party concept is really worth encouraging. About 30 of us gathered in DC..."*

The main challenges to connecting with others were: time zone differences (the most common issue), too many email notifications from Whova for some, and a lack of clear starting points for new members.

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

- Retain 'Meet Your Match' sessions across multiple time zones. Consider expanding to non-plenary RDA members for wider outreach and potential connections.
- Use the feedback findings from the regional Watch-Along sessions to analyse attendees engagement and experience.
- Submit a request to Whova to introduce a session recommendation feature to allow attendees share sessions of interest directly with others within the platform.

## Programme Content and Structure

RDA VP26 featured a mix of Working and Interest groups (WG, IG), Birds of a Feather (BoF), joint-groups, and regional in-person networking sessions. The programme spanned three global time zones to accommodate RDA's worldwide members. Participants appreciated the diversity of topics and the rapid availability of session recordings and presentation slides.

### ★ NEW AT VP26 ★

For the first time, **automatic subtitles were available** in all sessions. This was introduced in response to feedback from previous plenaries, recognising that English is not the first language for many RDA members. The addition was **widely appreciated by participants**.

AI and data management were the most talked-about themes across both surveys, with many participants keen to see more sessions on this topic:

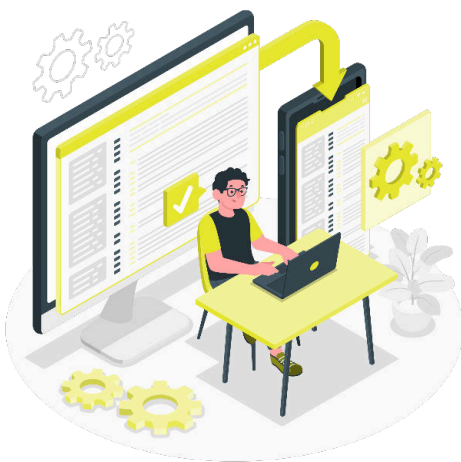
*"I loved the time spent on how AI is affecting data management."*

*"More AI-related sessions and intersections with research data."*

Some concerns were raised about the programme schedule:

- *"Sessions sometimes ran in parallel with closely related topics, making choices frustrating."*
- *"Many sessions focused on hard sciences; there needs to be coverage for all disciplines."*

The programme is built manually, based on approved submissions from RDA groups and members, balancing time zone preferences and group conflicts. While the programme covers a wide range of topics, it cannot always represent every research field.



Session chairs noted that running similar topics at the same time reduced attendance in individual sessions:

*"Consider offering more options for breakout slots and fewer sessions in parallel."*

Reducing parallel sessions remains a priority, however, running fewer sessions per breakout would significantly extend the plenary duration.

Attendees appreciated the pathways navigation tool, subtitles, and the flexibility to watch sessions asynchronously.

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

- Provide pathway descriptions in plain language for easy understanding.
- Offer a downloadable PDF web-programme in addition to the Whova view.
- Review the structure of future Plenary programmes, including the balance between parallel sessions and breakout slots, and consider adjustments where possible.

## Platform and Tools

RDA VP26 used Whova as its virtual event platform. The RDA has used Whova since the 18th Plenary (2021), and this familiarity is a benefit. However, some recurrent issues were raised by attendees.

### What participants valued:

- The ability to filter the programme by pathways, keyword, dates, times
- Automatic subtitle generation, appreciated for accessibility
- Rapid upload of session recordings and presentation slides
- Discussion boards and community spaces for engagement

Some limitations were noted:

*"Including full session descriptions in Whova would be useful. It takes too many clicks."*

*"If there is any way to distribute programme Zoom links without all the Whova overhead..."*

Two dedicated networking sessions were included in the programme to help participants connect. For attendees convenience, each session page on Whova featured a short description, speaker details, and a link to the full agenda. Zoom links and pre-registration requirements were clearly signposted in advance to ensure a smooth and secure experience for all plenary attendees.

The RDA Secretariat regularly reviews available virtual event platforms to ensure the best experience for plenary attendees. Following a recent assessment (January 2026), Whova remains the most cost-effective and user-friendly option for RDA plenaries.

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

- Continue to gather attendee feedback on the platform and share it directly with Whova. This will include requests such as easier access to session information and improved networking features between attendees.
- Continue providing English subtitles for all plenary programme sessions.

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## Organisational Support and Session Chair Experience

Session chairs reported an **overwhelmingly positive experience** with the RDA Secretariat support at the RDA VP26. The 20-minute pre-session technical check was described as a key confidence-builder. RDA staff were noted as active, knowledgeable, and very helpful.

*"RDA Org staff is well informed, on top of things, and part of the conversation, not just facilitating it!"*

*"Excellent support. The short time to provide session records, slides and chat was amazing."*

Some chairs requested earlier access to collaborative notes templates. Additionally, the RDA Secretariat provided access to Mentimeter accounts upon request to enable more interactive session formats, which was well received.

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

- Share collaborative notes with session chairs earlier than three weeks before the plenary.
- Promote offering to share access to collaborative tools (Slido, Mentimeter) for session chairs.

## Plenary Format and Future Plans

Attendees shared a range of views on plenary frequency and format. While most valued having regular opportunities to connect, a small number felt that two plenaries per year were too many. Many expressed a wish for the next plenary to include an online element for those who are unable to travel.

*"Virtual participation: please make P27 hybrid so those without travel support can join."*

*"I prefer in-person plenaries. I get that virtual provides more timezone coverage, but in-person is better for networking."*

The RDA 27th Plenary meeting is an in-person only meeting as a pilot and in response to feedback received in previous years. An explanation of the in-person only concept is available at <https://www.rd-alliance.org/rda-27th-plenary-meeting-an-in-person-gathering/>.

The community shared a number of ideas for future virtual plenaries, including more asynchronous engagement opportunities and expanded regional connections through hub-supported meetups. Regional connections refer to activities that bring RDA members together locally. At RDA VP26, this took the form of the Watch-Along session, where groups in America, Europe, and Oceania gathered in person to watch the Plenary together.

Some attendees suggested a virtual poster session. While it is a great idea for extra engagement, virtual poster sessions have proven difficult to deliver effectively, with high planning effort and low attendee engagement.

### Actions for the RDA Secretariat:

- The RDA Secretariat will continue to explore other creative ways to increase engagement at future virtual plenaries.
- Continue developing regional hub meetups as a complement to the virtual programme.

### A Note from the RDA Secretariat



**Thank you to** every RDA VP26 participant, session chair, and community volunteer who gave their time and shared their thoughts.

Your feedback directly shapes how RDA plans and delivers its global plenaries.

We look forward to welcoming you in person at the upcoming RDA 27th Plenary Meeting in London, 6-8 October 2026.

Stay updated with **the latest plenary news** [here](#)!