



RESEARCH DATA ALLIANCE

rd-alliance.org

Research Data Alliance Foundation

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RDA Council Election Processes & Procedures 2023

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1. RESEARCH DATA ALLIANCE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

1.1. CONTEXT

The Council maintains the vision of RDA, ensuring the guiding principles of the organisation are maintained, and formally endorses RDA Working and Interest Groups, Communities of Practice and Recommendations.

The Council is responsible for the overall oversight, success, strategy, and sustainability of the RDA. The powers and authority of the Council are described in the [RDA Governance Document](#). Details of the processes governing Council membership and responsibilities are described in the [Organisational and Process Plan Document](#).

The nine elected Council Members also serve as Trustees for the RDA Foundation, an official Charity registered in England and Wales under Company Number 9021881. Details are described in the Foundation's [Articles of Association](#).

1.2. MEMBERSHIP & COMPOSITION

Council Members are senior states people who do not represent any particular constituency or organization. In fact, Council members are required to serve in an individual capacity. Council members have broad connections with funders, one or more research or data communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, Council member accept a fiduciary role and, where necessary, vote on decisions. Council members are registered as Directors of the Research Data Alliance Foundation¹ for the entire duration of their term(s). Elected Council Members serve three-year terms and may serve for a maximum of two consecutive terms. The two Council co-chairs serve offset two-year terms.

In addition to the 9 elected members of Council, Council also has some non-voting, consensus forming members representing the [Organisational Advisory Board \(OA and OAB\)](#), the [Regional Advisory Board \(RAB\)](#), the [Technical Advisory Board \(TAB\)](#), and a representative from UKRI-STFC where the RDA Foundation is officially based. The [Secretary-General](#) reports to Council.

2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The RDA Council nominations and election process is outlined in the RDA Foundation UK (Legal entity) [Articles of Association](#) and the [RDA Governance Document](#). Details about the specific process for the nominations and the terms of reference for the Nominations Committee are set out in the Research Data Alliance (RDA) Council Nominations Committee Terms of Reference².

¹ A non-profit charitable organisation registered as a legal entity in the UK and is the official and legal representative of the RDA community as a whole. The RDA Foundation's legal headquarters are at Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Harwell Oxford, Didcot, Oxfordshire, OX11 0QX, United Kingdom. RDA Foundation is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The company was incorporated under a Memorandum of Association on 1 May 2014 and is a registered charity, charity number 1162762. It received charitable status on 21 July 2015.

² Research Data Alliance. (2022). RDA Council Nominations Committee Terms of Reference (Version 0.2). Research Data Alliance. <https://doi.org/10.15497/RDA00082>

2.1. OFFICIAL GUIDANCE UK:

As Council members are also directors and trustees of the RDA Foundation charitable organization, the following documents are relevant to the selection of Council members.

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/finding-new-trustees-cc30/finding-new-trustees> (Section 6)
- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/866947/CC3_feb20.pdf (Section 3)

The key paragraph is: *(3) The [existing] trustees agree responsibilities and a process for recruitment [of new trustees]; in doing this, they take care to comply with any specific requirements set out in the charity's governing document. Some of the work may be delegated to a sub-group of trustees, but the whole trustee board remains in full control of the process and decisions.*

In relation to RDA:

1. The Articles say that there should be a nomination committee but there is nothing in the articles that details the process the nomination committee should follow.
2. The Governance Document gives the high-level process in two paragraphs –

Candidate Council members are nominated by a Nominations Committee, a committee of the Council that is responsible for nominating Council members. The Nominations Committee is appointed by the current RDA Council. Details of the membership of the Nominations Committee (including the conditions for admission to and termination of such membership) and the regulations governing Nominations Committee proceedings are set out in the [Council Nominations Committee Selection Process](#) and [Guidelines document and the Nominations Committee Terms of Reference](#).

The Nominations Committee calls for nominations through the RDA Secretariat. The Nominations Committee then provides a set of three candidates, taking into account individual capability, the purpose of the Council, and the balance of Council membership. This set is presented to the RDA Membership and the recommendation of the Nominations Committee is either accepted, or rejected by a simple majority of votes. If the recommendation is rejected, the process re-commences for consideration at the following Plenary.

The second of these paragraphs would have to be changed. This is a legal requirement as the guidance says the trustees **must** follow the governing document's rules when recruiting trustees.

(4) The trustees consider the best methods of attracting a diverse range of candidates with the skills the charity needs. This may include advertising in the local and/or specialist press and using trustee brokerage services.

(5) Short-listing and interviews take place against agreed criteria. Interviews are carried out by a small panel of trustees, and each candidate is asked similar questions to ensure a fair and objective approach. Notes are kept of each interview.

[Finding new trustees, section 2.2]

3. ELECTION PROCESS (2023 onwards)

3.1. ELECTION PROCESS

1. Candidate Council members are nominated by a Nominations Committee, a committee of the Council that is responsible for nominating Council members.
2. The Nominations Committee is appointed by the current RDA Council. Details of the membership of the Nominations Committee (including the conditions for admission to and termination of such membership) and the regulations governing Nominations Committee proceedings are set out in the [Council Nominations Committee Selection Process and Guidelines document](#) and the [Nominations Committee Terms of Reference](#).
3. The Nominations Committee calls for nominations through the RDA Secretariat. The Council members (not standing for re-election) and Nominations Committee considers the best methods of attracting a diverse range of candidates with the skills and connections the Council needs.
4. Upon closure of the nominations period, the Nominations Committee then begins a process of short-listing, and interviews may take place against agreed criteria. Interviews are carried out by a small panel of committee (at least three) members, and each candidate is asked similar questions to ensure a fair and objective approach. Notes are kept of each interview.
5. The Nominations Committee provides a set of eligible candidates, considering individual capability, the purpose of the Council, and the balance of Council membership.
6. This set is presented to the RDA Membership and the community is invited to vote according to the RDA election procedures (adapted from the RDA Technical Advisory Board election process). All RDA members are eligible to vote in the elections and an on-line voting system is used to conduct the election.
7. The transition between members standing down and new members joining occurs on the first day of the month following announcement of the new Council members to the community.
8. In the event of a region not having reached the minimum number of Council members required, or if there are not enough candidates to fill all vacant seats, the remaining elected and observer Council members will decide on how to resolve the situation.

3.2. MEMBER VOTING PROCESS & BALANCING CRITERIA

3.2.1. Member Voting Process

RDA will ensure a balanced Council by publishing information on each candidate at least one month before the election, supporting informed membership voting, and by implementing an algorithm based on balance criteria. The Secretariat runs the election and follows the detailed steps outlined in the Annex.

- A list is prepared of which geographical coverage and disciplinary expertise is available in the Council members who are remaining in post. This information is made available for member review about one month before the scheduled vote.
- Additional information is made available at least one month before the scheduled vote. Each eligible candidate indicates what region and discipline³ they represent
- Each RDA member can give one vote for each vacancy on Council (i.e. three seats = three preferences / votes).
- The voting is open for three weeks. Votes are cast online and the candidates with the most votes are elected to Council with the caveat that the balancing criteria are met. The balancing algorithm (See 'Balancing Algorithm' section below) will be employed when any region or discipline is over- or under-represented.
- In the unlikely event of a draw, the Council will define a mechanism to ensure a fair outcome.
- The Secretariat confirms the validity of the election and announces the new Council members as soon as the results have been confirmed. The transition between members standing down and new members joining occurs on the first day of the month following announcement of the new Council members to the community.
- In the event of a region not having reached the minimum number of Council members required, or if there are not enough candidates to fill all vacant seats, the remaining elected and observer Council members will decide on how to resolve the situation.

3.2.2. Balancing Algorithm

The balancing algorithm is employed only if the election voting does not produce the required balances in the new Council.

Where a particular category would otherwise be underrepresented or overrepresented as a result of the voting, the balancing algorithm will eliminate the lowest ranked candidates from any overrepresented categories, in favour of the highest ranked candidates from underrepresented categories who did not reach the number of votes to be elected.

The following table gives a simple example: in this case, balance in qualification and expertise is required in three colours: RED, GREEN and BLUE with at least 1 and at most 4 from any one colour, and there are six continuing members of Council whose expertise is as in the following table. The voting produces results for the new candidates as shown. Then, working down the list of new candidates ranked in order of the number of votes received, candidate New 1 is elected because they have the most votes and selecting New 1 does not

³ Candidates should refer to the OECD (2015), Frascati Manual 2015: Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Data on Research and Experimental Development, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264239012-en>. For classification (see annex)

exceed any quotas. However, candidate New 2 is eliminated as the maximum quota on RED has been reached. Continuing down the list, candidate New 3 is elected but candidate New 4 is eliminated so that the minimum quota for BLUE can be reached. Then candidate 5 is elected and all seats are filled.

Candidate	Classification	#Votes	Count of RED	Count of GREEN	Count of BLUE	Elected?	Reason
Continuing 1	RED		1	0	0		
Continuing 2	GREEN		1	1	0		
Continuing 3	RED		2	1	0		
Continuing 4	GREEN		2	2	0		
Continuing 5	RED		3	2	0		
Continuing 6	GREEN		3	3	0		
New 1	RED	100	4	3	0	YES	
New 2	RED	90	5	3	0	NO	MAX RED
New 3	GREEN	80	4	4	0	YES	
New 4	GREEN	70	4	5	0	NO	MIN BLUE
New 5	BLUE	60	4	4	1	YES	
New 6	BLUE	50	4	4	2	NO	SEATS FILLED

It is clear that care needs to be taken in choosing quotas since the imposition of too many quotas or quotas that are too strict could lead to the election of candidates with lower electoral mandate.

3.2.3. Dimensions Requiring Balance

The aim is to achieve a Council with sufficient breadth of geographical representation, gender balance as well as scientific and professional/technological expertise to enable it to discharge its responsibility effectively. It will be necessary for the Council to have knowledge of initiatives across different geographical regions as well as provide Science & Technology (S&T) advice. It is appropriate therefore for quotas to be implemented in the balancing algorithm for these dimensions.

3.2.3.1. Balancing for Region

If we begin with the standard 7 continent model: Asia, Africa, America, Antarctica, Europe and Australia; and discounting Antarctica, it is overly constraining at the time of writing to require representation from all 6 continents. If instead we group the continents into three regions by longitude: (North America and South America, Europe and Africa, and Asia and Oceania), we can give quotas that ensure some degree of balance whilst not being overly constraining, for example by requiring a minimum of two and maximum of four from any one region.

Region	Minimum quota	Maximum quota
The Americas (North America and South America)	2	4

Europe and Africa	2	4
Asia and Oceania	2	4

Quotas for balancing by region

3.2.3.2. Balancing for Gender

In the spirit of the RDA Guiding Principles on inclusivity, gender balance on the RDA Council is essential and we strive for gender balance based on a minimum 30:30:40 (30% men, 30% women and 40% open) – at all levels of our governance bodies. This commitment is grounded in a core belief: to attract, recruit, retain and promote the best candidates, and to reap the diversity dividend, we must tap into the full talent pool. ⁴

3.2.3.3. Balancing for Science & Technology (S&T)

RDA applies the Fields of Science and Technology FOST[3] 2015 in the OECD Frascati model to classify R&D into fields which are then divided into 42 second level fields.

1. Natural sciences
2. Engineering and technology
3. Medical and health sciences
4. Agricultural sciences
5. Social sciences
6. Humanities

Using these six categories with a maximum quota of three with no minimum quota is meant to ensure S&T balance, where possible.

Classification	Minimum quota	Maximum quota
Natural sciences	None	3
Engineering and technology	None	3
Medical and health sciences	None	3
Agricultural sciences	None	3
Social sciences	None	3
Humanities	None	3

⁴ https://championsofchangecoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MCC-40-40-40-Talent-Processes-Toolkit-2019_Web_Final.pdf

Quotas for balancing by Science & Technology Area

Note that this classification and categorization is not always valid and applicable to candidates.

3.2.4. Order of Balancing Criteria

If multiple balancing criteria apply, they will be applied in the following order:

1. Region
2. Gender
3. Science & Technology Expertise

ANNEX OECD FRASCATI classification

BROAD CLASSIFICATION	Second-level classification
1. NATURAL SCIENCES	1.1 Mathematics
	1.2 Computer and information sciences
	1.3 Physical sciences
	1.4 Chemical sciences
	1.5 Earth and related environmental sciences
	1.6 Biological sciences
	1.7 Other natural sciences
2. ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY	2.1 Civil engineering
	2.2 Electrical engineering, electronic engineering, information engineering
	2.3 Mechanical engineering
	2.4 Chemical engineering
	2.5 Materials engineering
	2.6 Medical engineering
	2.7 Environmental engineering
	2.8 Environmental biotechnology
	2.9 Industrial biotechnology
	2.10 Nanotechnology
	2.11 Other engineering and technologies
3. MEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES	3.1 Basic medicine
	3.2 Clinical medicine
	3.3 Health sciences
	3.4 Medical biotechnology
	3.5 Other medical science
4. AGRICULTURAL AND VETERINARY SCIENCES	4.1 Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries
	4.2 Animal and dairy science
	4.3 Veterinary science
	4.4 Agricultural biotechnology
	4.5 Other agricultural sciences
5. SOCIAL SCIENCES	5.1 Psychology and cognitive sciences
	5.2 Economics and business
	5.3 Education
	5.4 Sociology
	5.5 Law
	5.6 Political science
	5.7 Social and economic geography
	5.8 Media and communications

6. HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS

5.9 Other social sciences

6.1 History and archaeology

6.2 Languages and literature

6.3 Philosophy, ethics and religion

6.4 Arts (arts, history of arts, performing arts, music)

6.5 Other humanities