



RNA Salons 2020/2021

Report to the RNA SOCIETY Board of Directors

by Dr. Ute Kothe

RNA Salons aim at enhancing interaction between RNA researchers with diverse expertise/interests so as to facilitate communication and training opportunities in RNA research and promote professional development for RNA scientists.

Summary

Despite the worldwide challenges of the pandemic, the RNA Salons continue to be a highly effective RNA SOCIETY program that engages and connects thousands of researchers worldwide. Thanks to a swift transition to virtual programming, the RNA Salons are providing a community for thousands of researchers. All Salons appreciate new opportunities to support their trainees with free RNA SOCIETY memberships and awards thus contributing to the global growth of our Society.

For the future, a 2-year funding option for established RNA Salons is proposed providing funding stability and minimizing administrative load.

Quick Facts:

- 34 funded + 18 continuing RNA Salons = 52 RNA Salons
- engaging > 7,000 scientists worldwide
- successful transition to virtual programming
- highly praised provision of one-year RNA Society memberships for 3 trainees per Salon
- continuing the productive collaboration with Lexogen

New this year

“Continuing” RNA Salons

Adapting to the pandemic conditions, we provided RNA Salons organizers with two options to proceed for 2020/2021: they could prepare an application for funding as usual or request by email to continue as an RNA Salon using funding remaining from 2019/2020. In the later case, the “continuing” RNA Salons could use the official RNA Salon title (which they are very proud of) and had to share participant information and to provide a final report. As several RNA Salons had left-over funding that was originally planned for catering at in-person events, this “easy” model allowed the

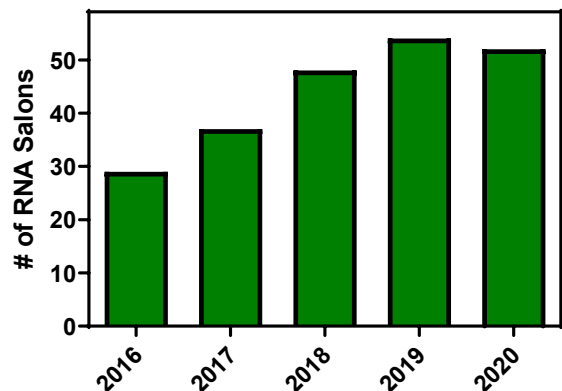


Fig. 1: Number of RNA Salons since 2016.

Keep a flexible funding plan, such as the no-cost one-year extension of the funds due to the pandemic, which was extremely helpful.

**Xavier Roca,
Singapore RNA Biology Alliance**

organizer to save time and effort while maintaining their status as RNA Salons. In total, 18 RNA Salons made use of this option and praised its flexibility and simplicity. As a result, the **RNA SOCIETY** was able to maintain the number of RNA Salons similar to previous years and continues to engage thousands of researchers (Fig. 1).

*Free one-year trainee **RNA SOCIETY** memberships*

To further support students and postdocs in the RNA community, each RNA Salon was offered three free, one-year **RNA SOCIETY** memberships for 2021. This was highly welcomed by the RNA Salons - in particular to facilitate student/postdoc participation in the virtual RNA 2021 meeting thereby further catalyzing engagement in our Society. Next year, we plan to continue this opportunity and streamline its administration with a common deadline in early February to nominate students/postdocs for the free membership.

Importantly, the possibility to use the funding for trainees to become members of the RNA Society is very much appreciated, as it is difficult to use any other funding for this purpose.

Andres Ramos, London RNA Club

Virtual Engagement

Once again, the RNA Salons have proven themselves by demonstrating utmost adaptability, creativity and flexibility. Already in May 2020, many RNA Salons had transitioned to virtual formats, and most RNA Salons quickly followed this trend in 2020/2021. The RNA Salon reports collected in May 2021 provide an amazing collection of different formats to promote community engagement! Clearly, the RNA Salons helped to overcome isolation, to promote RNA research and to connect thousands of junior and senior researchers locally, but also globally thanks to the virtual opportunities (Fig. 2).

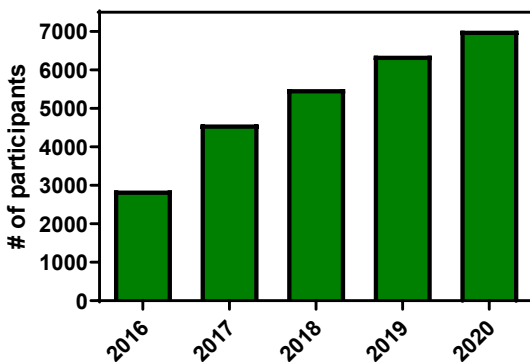


Fig. 2: RNA Salons participants since 2016.

Another exciting partnership started in January 2021. We were approached by Berlin RNA Salon organizers to jointly organize monthly seminars together with Berlin and London RNA Salons.

Our community is engaged and talkative, even on Zoom. Many people leave their cameras on and our talks generally result in a lively discussion afterward. Advertising on Twitter has actually brought a broader audience from around the world, which has been a highlight of the year.

Julie Claycomb, Toronto RNA Club

Future Plans and Opportunities

Seizing “virtual” opportunities: increased collaboration and continuing RNA Salons

Many RNA Salon organizers have plans to build upon successes with virtual programming which they commented is highly accessible and increasing attendance. Accordingly, several RNA Salons are planning to offer hybrid events in the future combining in-person and virtual participation. In addition, many RNA Salons plan to use the new opportunities to collaborate with other RNA Salons in their country or continent. Moreover, based on the creative suggestions of the RNA Salons, I will organize virtual get-togethers of RNA Salon organizers during summer 2021 to promote further collaboration, brainstorm creative programming ideas and further expand the RNA Salon program, e.g., to other geographic locations, with the support of the RNA Salon organizers.

With the general absence of in-person events in 2020/2021, some RNA Salons have transitioned their funding use to provide more support for trainees while other report having unused funds for future in-person events. Based on the RNA Salon organizers requests, we will therefore offer once again the opportunity for “continuing” RNA Salons that are part of our program, but don’t receive new funding for 2021/2022.

Increasing diversity (geographically & for underrepresented minorities)

In the last years, the RNA Salon has expanded its geographical reach in South America (2 RNA Salons) and Asia (China & Hong Kong, Singapore, India), and we strive to further expand the reach of this program by recruiting more RNA Salon organizers to start new chapters.

Nothing to add but thank you. A lot. This program is really important to us. It keeps our local RNA community motivated and alive. And generates a feeling of belonging to the RNA Society, that I think was missing in many of our members.

Juan Pablo Tosar, Uruguay RNA Salon

In addition, we aim to further support RNA Salon organizers in forming engaging communities that are welcoming for all types of underrepresented minorities. Several RNA Salon organizers already shared interesting future ideas in the recent reports, and this topic will be further explored during the virtual gatherings of RNA Salon organizers this summer to identify feasible ways of supporting DEI programming in a manner suitable for each RNA Salon.

Minimizing administrative load: 2-year support option

The **RNA SOCIETY** is supporting many highly engaging RNA Salons since numerous years that are very reliable and active (28 RNA Salons are supported since at least 4years). The organizers are highly interested to obtain stable funding and to minimize their administrative load.

Therefore, **I propose to offer a 2-year support cycle for established RNA Salons.**

This model would be reserved for RNA Salons with a proven track record of at least 2 years and a high-quality application. All other RNA Salons (new or with less detailed applications) would receive a 1-year support as before. Thereby, we could develop a staggered system where each year 1- and 2-year RNA Salon support is awarded based on merit. This would also reduce the administrative time required by the **RNA SOCIETY**. All RNA Salons must continue to provide annual participant information and complete an annual short report via a survey in May. If approved by the **RNA SOCIETY**, we will have to negotiate with Lexogen whether they are also willing to support established RNA Salons for two years, but this seems feasible given Lexogen's past commitment.

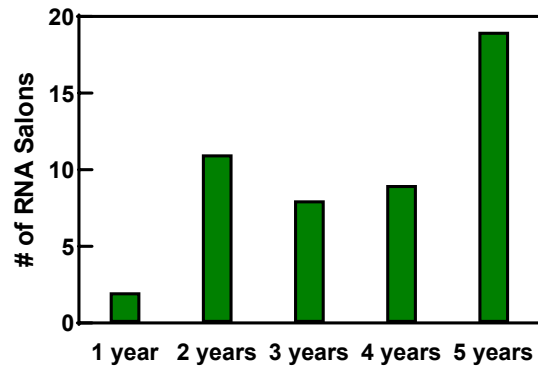


Fig. 3: Years of funding for current RNA Salons.

Prepared by:
Dr. Ute Kothe
RNA Salon Program Coordinator
Professor, University of Lethbridge
Alberta, Canada
May 18th, 2021