**RELIGIOUS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

The purpose of this strategic plan is to outline a course of action for the Religious Research Association (RRA). For over 50 years, RRA has stood at the intersection of research and application on religion. The original Certificate of Incorporation listed eight specific aims:

1. To further the development of religious research
2. To promote the publications of literature in the field
3. To develop and maintain professional standards for research in religion
4. To maintain religious and educational communication among members
5. To provide meetings where religious educational projects can be discussed
6. To promote the development of acceptable centers for instruction and training in religious education
7. To develop relationships with other religious and educational societies
8. To foster a climate favorable to research in religion within organized religious bodies and educational institutions

Over time, RRA grew from a small fraternity of Mainline Protestant researchers to an international, ecumenical, association of over 300 members. Today, the RRA website describes the Association’s identity and work with a distilled set of four goals:

1. To increase understanding of the function of religion in persons and society through application of social scientific and other scholarly methods
2. To promote the circulation, interpretation and use of the findings of religious research among religious bodies and other interested groups
3. To cooperate with other professional societies, groups and individuals interested in the study of religion
4. To aid in the professional development of religious researchers

The proud history of RRA and its journal the *Review of Religious Research* must not be taken for granted however. Careful planning for the future is necessary to ensure that RRA remains a healthy organization. After two years of work, the resulting strategic plan outlines five thematic areas for RRA attention in the coming years: Identity, Audience, Communication/Networking, Annual Meetings, and Professional Development. The following pages provide background on each theme and present suggested action items. Appendices describe the process of strategic planning, including results from a 2016 membership survey.

**THEME 1: IDENTITY**

The Religious Research Association (RRA) began in 1951 as a purely applied organization, dedicated to helping (mostly Protestant) congregations and denominations use the findings of the social sciences. Over the years, academic researchers increasingly began to join RRA at the same time that many denominational research offices decreased in size, so that, according to the 2016 membership survey, only 20% of the membership are either clergy or researchers for denominations and other nonprofits as compared to 62% who are faculty at institutions of higher education. This has led to some confusion and/or dissatisfaction among members regarding the identity of RRA. On the one hand, when answering the open-ended question (Q6) in the membership survey about the organization’s identity, a far larger percentage of the respondents cited a focus on applied studies than mentioned supporting academic research (46% as compared to 27%). Another 22% said that the role of RRA was to serve as a bridge between academic and applied denominational researchers. Among the 16 respondents to the 2016 leadership survey, the distinctiveness of the RRA’s applied focus was mentioned by seven (44%) of those who evaluated the organization’s goals, and by four (25%) of those suggesting improvements for the Association.

On the other hand, RRA’s academic focus was also quite evident in the membership survey answers. “Receiving the Journal” and “Opportunities to contribute to the study of religion,” at 95% and 94% respectively, were the most commonly cited reasons for the respondents’ desire to be a RRA member (Q23). The applied focus, “The RRA’s mission to connect research and application” (91%) was the third-highest choice. Similarly, the most common way that the respondents disseminated their own research findings (Q8) was in refereed academic journals (42%), rather than by working with or for denominations (38%) or by offering educational sessions to denominational leaders and practitioners (37%). At the end of the membership survey, when 91 respondents listed the specific focus of their own research, close to half (42%) listed a focus that appeared to be applied, while 52% listed foci that appeared more academic or theoretical.

The two competing foci were reflected in the answers to other questions as well. Some respondents to the membership survey recommended that the applied focus be strengthened in RRA and its journal, in response to what they perceived as a “takeover” of the organization by academics: 8 of the 19 members who listed specific dissatisfactions with the journal in one open-ended question (Q26) requested a more specific applied focus, as compared to 6 who asked for more high quality academic research articles. In the leadership survey, six respondents (38%) recommended a greater applied focus for the journal, but four (25%) desired more articles and a higher impact factor, both more academic concerns. One respondent listed both:

I have dueling concerns. One is that the impact factor is so low that it hurts the reputation of the Association. Second is that the journal is not adequately reaching religious practitioners. Sadly, these two concerns may be mutually exclusive.

Possibly as a result of the organization’s attempt to reconcile its academic and applied identities, 14% of respondents said they were not sure what the RRA’s mission is. A few even felt that the image of RRA and its journal was basically to publish work that was not of high enough quality to be accepted by journals with higher impact factors. This concern about not knowing the organization’s goals was echoed in the leadership survey:

I have only missed a couple of board meetings in 35+ years and didn’t even know we had these [official] goals.

In spite of these somewhat disturbing findings, almost three-fourths of the respondents in the membership survey (71%) were satisfied with the current direction of RRA (Q18), and 69% said that it was mostly or completely successful in fulfilling its mission (Q7). Almost 80% agreed that RRA provides a strong voice to applied researchers in nonacademic settings (Q5). Female respondents (more of whom work in applied settings) expressed less satisfaction than males with the current direction of RRA (a median of 2.1 as compared to 1.5 where 1 indicated “Very Satisfied”) and were slightly less likely to rate RRA as “fully” or “mostly” successful in fulfilling its mission (a median of 1.8 as compared to 1.6). They were also less likely than male respondents to agree that RRA provides a “strong voice” to applied researchers (2.0 as compared to 1.5). Those with backgrounds in psychology and those who had been members for fewer than 5 years were less likely to rate RRA highly on these questions, while those who had been members for 11 to 20 years were the most likely to do so.

Overall, respondents to the leadership survey held a generally positive view of RRA. One concerning aspect that stood out among leaders was the feeling that RRA does not distinguish itself enough from SSSR in terms of its membership, publications, or organization goals and objectives. The view that RRA needs to distinguish itself from SSSR was mentioned approximately ten times by leaders in response to multiple questions. However, even though there seems to be a need for RRA to grow from its current junior status to SSSR, the overarching opinion was that complete separation would be detrimental to RRA.

It appears evident from the survey responses that RRA needs to clarify its identity in a way that distinguishes it from other professional organizations. Without a distinctive identity, the organization will be unable to attract new members or resist pressures to merge with other associations. Such an identity will also need to be clearly articulated in venues that reach interested persons and attract them to become members. This may require changes in RRA’s journal, website, and existing communication strategies, or it may require the development of new modes to communicate the organization’s identity, especially to denominational researchers and those academics who focus on applied topics. For example, several respondents to the leadership survey suggested that denominational reports in the journal could be expanded.

*Suggested Action Items:*

1. *Create a new mission statement and logo.*
2. *Review all programs and grants to ensure proper alignment with RRA’s mission.*
3. *Emphasize the applied focus more directly in the journal, such as requiring research articles to have a “Practical Implications” section and/or expanding denominational reports (perhaps in place of book reviews).*

**THEME 2: APPLIED AUDIENCE**

From a high of 400 members in 2013, RRA membership has declined and stood at 318 at the end of 2017. This is similar to declines experienced by many professional associations. If RRA is to attract more members, and especially if its focus on applied membership and research is to be strengthened (which more than 93% of the membership survey respondents desired), it is important first to examine the composition of the current membership to see what categories are over- or under-represented. It is also important to examine the environment from which the organization might draw new members.

According to the 2016 membership survey, most (745%) of RRA’s members are male, and their median age is in 55-59 years old. Fewer than 10% are under the age of 35. Approximately 13% are retired, and fewer than three percent (2.5%) are students. Sociology is by far the most commonly claimed discipline, with 59% of the respondents claiming this specialty. The next highest fields were religion/theology and psychology, which each accounted for 14% of the respondents. Political science, communication, anthropology, family science, and other disciplines each accounted for less than 3% of the membership. No respondents had backgrounds in economics or history. In terms of research interests, the largest number of respondents (41%) studied mainline Protestant denominations, with smaller numbers researching Catholics (19%), evangelicals/conservative Protestants (17%), or Christians in general (13%). Three or fewer respondents report researching one of the following groups: Mormons, African American churches, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or New Religious Movements.

It would seem logical that RRA’s efforts should concentrate on attempting to recruit persons from underrepresented areas who are interested in applying the findings of various disciplines to religious organizations. One must first determine, however, how many such persons exist. As several respondents to the leadership survey pointed out, there are fewer and fewer denominations that support a research unit or department:

The decline of denominational research units and the emergence of generational cleavages among members have presented RRA with formidable challenges. These challenges have raised questions about the relevance of RRA among some of its members.

The fortunes of the RRA are dependent upon the fortunes of American denominations and upon the academic study of the sociology of religion (particularly “churchy” sociology). Right now, both are downtrending.

A first step, therefore, would be to identify where researchers on religion and churches might exist. Some possible ways of doing this might be to contact the following groups or organizations:

* Denominational officials and religious institutions of higher education, especially in faith traditions outside of Mainstream Protestantism and Catholicism – for example, the Mormon Social Science Association, African American denominations, World Congress of Muslim Philanthropists, International Institute of Islamic Thought, and faith-based universities outside the Christian tradition
* Specialty sections on religion and/or applied research in the American Academy of Religion, American Political Science Association, American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB)
* Professional associations of journalists who report on religion, lawyers who litigate church/state issues, chaplains, social workers, counselors, or medical personnel
* Seminaries and ministerial associations such as Association of Doctor of Ministry Directors, Roman Catholic Pastoral Planning Offices, and similar data-gathering/information/planning offices in other faith groups.
* Foundations that fund religious research and organizations that conduct it (Lilly Endowment Inc., Ford Foundation, John Templeton Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, Barna Group, Lifeway, PRRI, Faith Communities Today, etc.)

An attractive feature of RRA, cited by several survey respondents, was the comparatively low financial cost of membership. Perhaps a special invitation to one year of membership or a reduced fee for the SSSR+RRA meeting (accompanied by a list of relevant applied session topics) could attract members from these groups. Responses to the leadership survey also noted that denominational reports published in the *Review of Religious Research* could be better publicized to the respective groups.

*Suggested Action Items:*

* 1. *Keep membership costs affordable.*
  2. *Reach out to seminaries, young scholars, women, and the various groups listed above.*
  3. *Coordinate with existing organizations outside of traditional Christian denominations.*

**THEME 3: COMMUNICATION/NETWORKING**

Voluntary organizations benefit from linking link members to one another and to the organization. Networking supports a level of member commitment that ensures voluntary participation in annual meetings, leadership positions, and informal recruitment efforts. Unfortunately, only 22% of members were very satisfied with RRA’s efforts at providing a collaborative network of scholars and another 39% were somewhat satisfied. Yet when asked about why they are members of RRA, the opportunities for networking was rated as extremely important for 47% of members, with 32% saying this was somewhat important. “Opportunities for networking” was highly ranked as a reason for becoming and remaining an RRA member. Help in connecting with other members who shared their interests was the most often mentioned – by 38% of the respondents – of the services that members said they wanted RRA to provide more frequently. Similarly, seven of the respondents to the leadership survey (44%) mentioned networking and stronger connections to colleagues as a benefit of their leadership service in RRA.

A notable feature of the current RRA membership when thinking about communication is that it is comparatively old (as noted, median age in the survey was 55-59 years old). Age is reflected in the survey responses regarding RRA communication. While almost all respondents (95%) cited receiving the journal as either extremely or somewhat important in their decision to be a RRA member, most (77%) did not participate in the RRX electronic network and close to one-fifth (17%) rarely or never access the RRA website. For their own research, members disproportionally rely on publishing in academic journals, and seldom or never use Twitter, blog posts, or other websites. Perhaps surprisingly, most also do not disseminate their research through religious newsletters or magazines (60% rarely or never do so) or interact with journalists (56% rarely or never do this).

To attract more young scholars and practitioners, it will be necessary to present the identity and mission of RRA in formats which they will see and find attractive– and that means electronic communication. Yet when asked how RRA could better facilitate the dissemination of its members’ research, 8% said they did not know, and another 6% gave only vague answers like “a better website” or “social media.” While many members said they would like to receive an electronic newsletter, several cautioned that such a newsletter would be good “only if it is attractive and actually read.”

A large majority of survey respondents (81%) was interested in an electronic newsletter. A newsletter would allow the dissemination of member news and Association updates. It was also clear from several of the open-ended comments that the newsletter should have articles of substance, perhaps summaries of conference presentations or denominational research reports published in the journal. Further, the newsletter could become a networking tool as it encourages members to attend annual meetings, create themed sessions, or be alerted to other networking events.

Another viable communication and networking tool is the existing RRX listserv. RRX has functioned as a connection point for denominational researchers for over 15 years, but only 23% of survey respondents reported being involved in RRX. At present, the listserv is not active due to problems with the distribution platform.

Members indicated that they would like RRA to assist them in finding ways to get broader dissemination of their research to larger audiences. In response to a question regarding the ways that RRA could serve members, 32% said RRA should better facilitate the dissemination of their research to various consumers. Over a third of respondents included open-ended suggestions of ways to do this, such as distributing press releases of notable findings, posting research updates in the journal or newsletter, expanding the research notes section of the journal, or considering a magazine-type medium to reach a more popular audience. Other suggestions included the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter, summaries of conference presentations posted to the website, popularly written applied summaries like “Ahead of the Trend” on the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), and posting research notes from the journal on the website.

A new social media partnership among the major sociology of religion organizations (RRA, SSSR, ASR, and ASA Religion Section) launched in January 2018, but the collaboration is primarily directed at a professional, academic audience. Comments on RRA surveys indicated a desire for communications to an applied audience, one that was connected to congregations, denominations, religious leaders, and nonprofits. If RRA had its own Facebook page, this too could become a communications platform for new research by the members.

It is clear that RRA needs to consider the creation of an integrated communications/networking strategy that links members as well as reaches outward to a broader public. Such a strategy would enhance organizational identity and recruitment efforts.

*Suggested Action Items:*

1. *Expand the RRA presence on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.*
2. *Provide opportunities to present or attend presentations via Skype or live webinar or similar medium. Podcast major presentations so that those who are unable to attend can get some of the benefits from it.*
3. *Provide abstracts or summaries of presentations at the annual meeting on the RRA website.*
4. *Create an electronic newsletter.*
5. *Get a new platform for the RRX listserv and actively promote it to RRA members.*
6. *Explore adding a communications-publicity person as a member of the Board of Directors.*

**THEME 4: ANNUAL MEETING**

The annual meeting is one of the two main “faces” of RRA. According to the membership survey, most members are satisfied with the meeting. Nearly half of respondents (46%) said they were very satisfied, 35% were satisfied, while 19% were neutral. Nobody reported dissatisfaction. This level of satisfaction was exceeded only by the amount paid for membership, with which 86% were very satisfied.

The annual meeting, generally modeled on and an integral part of the SSSR annual meeting, seems to be serving the needs of academics more than applied and denominational researchers, although applied researchers are not dissatisfied. Members who work in college or university settings were much more likely to say that they were very satisfied (53%) than those who work in applied settings (33%). Women were more likely to be very satisfied than men (67% compared with 41%). Satisfaction with the annual meeting did not differ by age.

The large majority (72%) of those who attend every year or nearly every year are university-based. Nevertheless, RRA members from academic and applied settings are equally likely to attend (62% of each group attend every year or nearly every year), although academics are more likely to present papers than those working in applied settings. Women also are more likely to be regular attenders than men, 78% saying they attend every year or almost every year.

Location does not seem to have much effect on whether people attend the Annual Meeting. Of the four annual meeting locations on the survey, 57% of respondents attended in Indianapolis, as compared with 50% in Phoenix, 53% in Boston and 48% in Newport Beach. Members living in the West were most likely to attend in Phoenix (62%), but least likely to attend in Newport Beach (31%).

Cost is the largest reason that people gave for not attending, mentioned by nearly a third of those who provided reasons. The majority of these said that institutional travel budgets had been cut and they had to choose among conferences. Several specifically cited Phoenix and Long Beach as being too far away or too expensive. A relatively small percentage of RRA members (12%, according to the 2016 membership survey) live in the Western United States. In addition, 24% said that other meetings took priority (and for some, RRA does not appear to be their most important organizational affiliation), and 9% cited scheduling conflicts. About equal numbers (18%) said they could not afford the time, or that they were retired. Other reasons cited included living out of the country (7%) and having family conflicts (6%). Members working in applied settings were more likely to cite scheduling conflicts and less likely to cite costs than were those in academic settings. Eleven percent cited not having any research to report. This may suggest that either attending just to listen and learn is not a sufficient motivation, or a member’s institution may only pay travel expenses if they are a presenter.

Both members and leaders offered a variety of suggestions for improving the annual meeting. Of the 16 leaders completing the survey, 6 (38%) said that no changes were needed, highlighting overall satisfaction with the meetings among leaders. About a third of leaders (5) encouraged more opportunities to interact with religious practitioners. Several leaders and members endorsed the “Day Away” concept of holding an event targeted to religious professionals as part of the annual meeting. Although outside attendance has not been high, all who mentioned it supported its continuation in some form.

Some leaders said that RRA sessions could be a larger part of the program if more people presented through RRA rather than SSSR. It may be that presenters consider SSSR sessions as more prestigious or meeting participants may not know why they should present through RRA. The online submission system for paper proposals exacerbates this issue. The current system on SSSR’s website makes presenting in a SSSR session the default setting.

Three leaders emphasized the need to differentiate RRA from SSSR at the meetings. One leader provided some background on RRA’s previous efforts to meet with the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR). While that did not happen and RRA then began meeting with the SSSR, the leader suggested that RRA might revisit the idea of meeting with ASR. Other leaders suggested having joint meetings with other organizations, particularly those oriented toward applied research such as the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies or the Faith Communities Today research group.

In conclusion, while most members are satisfied with the annual meeting, it serves the needs of members who work in academic settings better than it does those who work in applied settings. Four major issues emerge related to the annual meetings: 1) Cost of travel and increased registration to attend Annual Meeting is a barrier to some who would want to attend; 2) The Annual Meeting does not have enough time for networking opportunities; 3) RRA sessions are not sufficiently different from SSSR sessions and are not as appealing to members from more applied positions; and (4) Few consumers of our research (denominational executives, seminary professors, church consultants) attend the annual meeting. Changes in these areas will help better align the annual meeting with the goals of RRA.

*Suggested Action Items:*

1. *Keep the cost of meeting registration and attendance affordable.*
2. *Rather than have a separate theme for the RRA meeting, organize “practical, application-oriented presentations” related to the SSSR theme.*
3. *Request that presenters for all RRA sessions include in their presentations information on how their research can be applied. Request Discussants to follow-up as appropriate.*
4. *Involve local religious leaders in program panels, either as presenters or as discussants or responders who might stress the applications of the findings.*
5. *Expand opportunities for social interaction through networking meals, a RRA Hospitality Suite in the conference hotel, and/or scheduled sessions for groups such as RRX or Congregational Scholars.*
6. *Continue the Day Away initiative and increase outreach to local clergy, denominational staffs, seminary professors, etc. In appropriate locations, this could occur at a local seminary on the Thursday before the meeting.*

**THEME 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Professional development is another prominent theme worthy of RRA investment. While neither the membership nor leadership surveys contained specific questions about professional development, 81% of those responding either agreed or strongly agreed that they “would like to see more workshops, seminars, etc. designed specifically for people who work in applied settings.” This suggests a latent demand for professional development within RRA. In the past, such workshops at the annual meeting have been popular.

Although the annual meeting is an important vehicle for professional development, it is not the only possible one. Webinars on topics of interest could be held throughout the year. One inexpensive option is a telephone conference call in which a speaker presents a lecture using a PowerPoint presentation sent to participants in advance. Participants can hear the presenter while seeing the slides on-line, and then participate in a question and answer or discussion time afterward. Other platforms are available that allow participants to see the presenter on their computer screens and interact by keyboard or voice connection. A monthly or quarterly professional development series could cover a variety of topics without requiring the time and financial costs of attending an annual meeting. potentially reaching more members.

When denominational research offices and other applied settings seek to hire professional staff, the RRA is one outlet for advertising such positions. Often, however, researchers are recruited from other sources who may or may not have a background in research on religion. Because of staff cutbacks, internal positions often are filled with people with specific skills in data management or website management, but not academic training in research on religion. This suggests that 1) the RRA could be helpful in building a “pipeline” to attract and train people for future positions, and 2) the RRA could be a good vehicle to provide specific knowledge on research on religion to those who come from other fields or additional skills to those hired for a specific function.

*Suggested Action Items:*

1. *Make some RRA sessions at annual meetings into workshops on topics of interest (e.g., how to distribute your work to non-research audiences).*
2. *Organize an Ask the Expert session at annual meetings. People who are considering a project could sign-up for 15-20 minutes to get advice from a relevant expert.*
3. *Host a quarterly or monthly series of webinars for professional development.*
4. *Develop a summer internship program for graduate-level social science students in which they receive a stipend for working in a denominational research office. Costs could be shared with the office receiving the intern.*

**APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

The development of this strategic plan occurred over a two-year period. Special thanks go to former RRA president John Bartkowski and his team of students for data collection and preliminary analysis. The major steps of the planning process are described below.

2016 Membership Survey

The membership survey was conceptualized in collaboration with RRA Executive Officer Kevin Dougherty, RRA President-elect Scott Thumma, and students of Dr. John P. Bartkowski’s graduate evaluation research seminar at the University of Texas in San Antonio. Topics of interest ranged from membership demographics to levels of satisfaction with RRA. The survey was administered online via SurveyMonkey from March 21, 2016 to April 20, 2016. Of 312 total members in the Association in 2016, 129 responded to the membership survey for a 41% response rate. In comparison to RRA membership records for 2016, students (12% of RRA, 3% of survey respondents) and members from outside the United States (17% of RRA, 9% of respondents) were under-represented in the sample. However, gender composition in the sample did approximate the full membership (27% women in RRA, 25% women in sample).

2016 Leadership Survey

Data pertaining to leadership was obtained through an online, open-ended questionnaire deployed through Survey Monkey on March 22, 2016 to April 20, 2016. The questionnaire included 10 questions relating organizational goals, organizational accomplishments and challenges, and review/critique of the association’s leadership, meetings, journal, and relationship structures. The first question on the leadership questionnaire asked respondents to identify their past and/or present leadership positions within RRA. In order to main anonymity, only a general assessment of the leadership roles was conducted. An email invitation was sent to 34 former RRA leaders and 16 completed the questionnaire (47% response rate). Participants included approximately 11 past and/or present board members, 9 committee members, and a variety of other leaders including but not limited to journal editors, secretaries, executive officers, presidents, and program chairs.

2016 Organizational Evaluation

Graduate students in Dr. John Bartkowski’s Evaluation Research Seminar at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) produced an organizational evaluation report. Participating UTSA students were Sara Kluckhohn, Kelsey Krueger, Melissa Mason, and Shanice Mzavas. The report was sent to RRA Executive Officer Kevin Dougherty on June 11, 2016.

2017-2018 Task Force

RRA Executive Officer Kevin Dougherty distributed the organizational evaluation report at the 2017 RRA Board of Directors Meeting in Washington, DC. He proposed an ad hoc task force to draft a strategic plan. RRA President Scott Thumma, President-elect Patricia Wittberg, and Board members Marjorie Royle and Deb Coe volunteered for the task force. The task force analyzed survey data from leaders and members to identify major themes. Preliminary reports for each theme were sent to Kevin Dougherty in early June 2018. Kevin assembled the reports into a single document. The strategic plan draft was reviewed by task force members in late June 2018. A revised draft was sent to the RRA Board of Directors and posted on the RRA website for members’ comments in July 2018.

**APPENDIX B: 2016 RRA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY RESULTS**

## Religious Research Association Membership Survey

Q1. How many years have you been a member of the Religious Research Association (RRA)?

Less than 5 years 21.7%

5-10 years 20.9%

11-20 years 19.8%

Over 20 years 38.0%

Q2. In addition to RRA, to which of the following religion specialty organizations do you also belong? (Select all that apply.)

American Academy of Religion 9.2%

Association for the Sociology of Religion 51.3%

ASA Sociology of Religion Section 37.8%

Society for the Psychology of Religion  
and Spirituality (APA Division 36) 10.9%

Society for the Scientific Study of Religion 86.6%

Others (please specify) 26.1%

Q3. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being "least important" and 7 being "most important," how would you rank the importance of RRA in comparison to the other professional associations to which you belong?

1 (Least Important) 2.3%

2 4.7%

3 14.1%

4 24.2%

5 20.3%

6 22.7%

7 (Most Important) 11.7%

Mean = 4.70

Q4. I believe that the RRA should seek to broaden its constituency of persons interested in applied research.

Strongly Agree 32.5%

Agree 60.5%

Disagree 6.1%

Strongly Disagree 0.9%

Q5. The Religious Research Association provides a strong "voice" to "applied" researchers in nonacademic settings.

Strongly Agree 32.5%

Agree 60.5%

Disagree 6.1%

Strongly Disagree 0.9%

Q6. In your own words, please describe the mission and identity of the Religious Research Association.

Promotion of applied research (n=37)

Publishing research (n=25)

Uncertain or unknown (n=12)

Q7. How successful is the RRA in fulfilling this mission?

Not at all successful 1.1%

Partially successful 21.3%

Mostly successful 69.2%

Fully successful 8.5%

Q8. There are many ways our research and writings are disseminated to various constituencies in this day and age. Please indicate the ways your work is made available to others.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very Often | Often | Occasionally | Seldom | Not at all | Mean |
| I publish in academic journals. | 18.8% | 23.2% | 30.4% | 17.9% | 9.8% | 2.77 |
| I publish in books and edited volumes. | 9.0% | 14.4% | 39.6% | 18.0% | 18.9% | 3.23 |
| I publish in religious newsletters, magazines, and journals. | 0.9% | 8.1% | 30.6% | 27.0% | 33.3% | 3.84 |
| I publish blog posts of commentary and research. | 3.5% | 4.4% | 18.6% | 15.9% | 57.5% | 4.19 |
| I publish my work on a website. | 4.4% | 4.4% | 19.5% | 16.8% | 54.9% | 4.13 |
| I use Twitter to share research findings. | 2.7% | 3.6% | 10.8% | 8.1% | 74.8% | 4.49 |
| I use Facebook, either a personal or group page. | 14.3% | 15.2% | 13.4% | 9.8% | 47.3% | 3.61 |
| I interact directly with religious organizations as a consultant or agency staff. | 19.5% | 12.4% | 24.8% | 19.5% | 23.9% | 3.16 |
| I interact with journalists and members of the press. | 6.3% | 8.1% | 29.7% | 27.9% | 27.9% | 3.63 |
| I interact directly with religious leaders and practitioners through teaching. | 19.3% | 11.4% | 26.3% | 16.7% | 26.3% | 3.19 |
| I use other methods and modes to distribute my research and findings  about religion. | 9.7% | 11.7% | 12.6% | 14.6% | 51.5% | 3.86 |

Q9. Through which one of the following methods do you use most often disseminate your research?

Academic journals 45.6%

Books and edited volumes 12.6%

Popular articles in religious journals 1.0%

Blog posts of commentary and research 1.9%

Website 4.9%

Twitter to share research findings 0.0%

Facebook, either a personal or group page 1.0%

Directly to religious organizations as a consultant  
or agency staff (e.g., reports) 14.6%

Journals and members of the press 1.0%

Religious leaders and practitioners   
through teaching 8.7%

Other methods and modes of   
research dissemination 8.7%

Q10. RRA members have many different “consumers” of their research: students, other academics, religious leaders, denominations, nonprofits, and the general public. How much do you envision the following as primary consumers of your work and research?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Absolutely | Considerable | Somewhat | Very little | Not at all | Mean |
| Academics in your discipline | 50.0% | 23.2% | 19.6% | 5.4% | 1.8% | 1.86 |
| Scholars in general | 13.4% | 40.2% | 33.9% | 9.8% | 2.7% | 2.48 |
| Students in educational programs | 17.0% | 34.8% | 33.0% | 14.3% | 0.9% | 2.47 |
| Denominational executives | 28.1% | 19.3% | 30.7% | 16.7% | 5.3% | 2.52 |
| Religious practitioners | 21.2% | 23.0% | 38.9% | 12.4% | 4.4% | 2.56 |
| Consultants who work with religious groups | 14.9% | 21.9% | 36.0% | 17.5% | 9.7% | 2.85 |
| Public institutions (health, government, policy-makers) | 3.6% | 10.7% | 27.7% | 38.4% | 19.6% | 3.60 |
| Nonprofit agencies | 8.0% | 17.0% | 31.3% | 29.5% | 14.3% | 3.25 |
| The general public | 6.2% | 15.0% | 43.4% | 26.6% | 8.9% | 3.17 |

Q11. Could RRA better facilitate the dissemination of your research to various consumers?

Absolutely 13.5%

Considerably 18.9%

Somewhat 31.5%

Very little 18.9%

Not at all 6.3%

Not applicable (not currently conducting research) 10.8%

Q12. How often do you typically attend SSSR/RRA meetings, whether you are on the program or not?

Every year 30.7%

Almost every year 26.3%

Once every few years 17.5%

Seldom 14.9%

Never 10.5%

Q13. Next, we have a few questions about your participation in recent meetings. For each of the following, please check all that apply.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2012  Phoenix, AZ | 2013  Boston, MA | 2014  Indianapolis, IN | 2015  Newport Beach, CA |
| Attended the meeting | 72.0% | 76.0% | 80.0% | 68.0% |
| Presented a paper in an RRA session | 60.0% | 50.0% | 56.0% | 50.0% |
| Organized an RRA session | 26.7% | 33.3% | 60.0% | 53.3% |

Q14. How often do you typically submit a paper for presentation at the SSSR/RRA meetings?

Every year 27.3%

Almost every year 20.9%

Once every few years 19.1%

Seldom 17.3%

Never 15.5%

Q15. If you haven’t participated lately, please share the reason(s) you haven’t attended.

Expense (n=16)

No longer active in research (n=13)

Schedule conflict (n=9)

Q16. Have you ever been involved in a formal leadership role in RRA (i.e. officer, member of board, committee member or chair, etc.)?

Yes 38.9%

No 61.1%

Q17. Are you a member of the RRX electronic network?

Yes 23.0%

No 77.0%

Q18. Please express your satisfaction with the following questions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Neutral | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | Mean |
| Overall, how satisfied are you with the current direction of RRA? | 29.5% | 41.1% | 25.9% | 2.7% | 0.9% | 2.04 |
| Overall, how satisfied are you with the organization’s effort to cultivate a collaborative network for its members? | 21.8% | 39.1% | 32.7% | 4.6% | 1.8% | 2.25 |
| How satisfied have you been with the annual meetings co-sponsored by RRA and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in the past few years? | 45.9% | 34.9% | 19.3% | 0% | 0% | 1.73 |
| How satisfied are you with the amount you pay for membership in RRA? (Regular Membership is US$35.00 per year and Student Membership is US$20.00 per year, both include subscription to the Review of Religious Research) | 86.1% | 9.3% | 4.6% | 0% | 0% | 1.19 |
| How satisfied are you with the RRA website, www.RRAweb.org? | 30.8% | 28.0% | 33.6% | 5.6% | 1.9% | 2.20 |

Q19. What suggestions do you have for improving the website?

Faster load time(n=4)

More information on funding opportunities (n=2)

Q20. I would like to see the format of the RRA sessions include more workshops, seminars, etc. designed specifically for people who work in applied settings.

Strongly Agree 31.7%

Agree 49.0%

Disagree 18.3%

Strongly Disagree 1.0%

Q21. Would you like to receive an electronic newsletter from RRA?

Yes 81.1%

No 18.9%

Q22. Are there other services you would like to receive from RRA that you currently do not? If so, please describe them here.

More networking opportunities (n=8)

Q23. How important is each of the following reasons in your decision to be a RRA member?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Extremely important | Somewhat important | Somewhat unimportant | Not at all important | Mean |
| The RRA mission is to connect research and application to religion | 67.6% | 23.4% | 7.2% | 1.8% | 1.43 |
| Attending annual meetings | 41.8% | 30.9% | 16.4% | 10.9 | 1.96 |
| Receiving the Association’s journal, Review of Religious Research | 60.0% | 34.6% | 4.6% | 0.9% | 1.46 |
| Publishing in the Association’s journal, Review of Religious Research | 40.7% | 31.5% | 12.0% | 15.7% | 2.03 |
| Eligibility for the Constant H. Jacquet Research Award | 10.2% | 19.4% | 13.9% | 56.5% | 3.17 |
| Opportunities for networking | 46.8% | 32.1% | 13.8% | 7.3% | 1.82 |
| To broaden my own research perspectives | 56.4% | 34.6% | 5.5% | 3.6% | 1.56 |
| Opportunities to contribute to the study of religion | 58.2% | 34.6% | 6.4% | 0.9% | 1.50 |

Q24. Are there any OTHER factors that are important for your decision to be a member of RRA? If so, please list them here.

Study religion (n=3)

Q25. Please indicate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the journal.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Very satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Neutral | Somewhat dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | Mean |
| How satisfied are you with the overall quality of the journal? | 47.3% | 41.1% | 8.0% | 3.6% | 0% | 1.68 |
| How satisfied are you with the quality of the scholarship that appears in RRR? | 44.6% | 42.9% | 8.9% | 3.6% | 0% | 1.71 |
| How satisfied are you with the diversity of substantive topics that appear in RRR? | 32.1% | 43.8% | 20.5% | 2.7% | 0.9% | 1.96 |
| How satisfied are you with the number of articles that appear in each issue? | 51.8% | 37.5% | 7.1% | 3.6% | 0% | 1.63 |
| How satisfied are you with the book reviews that appear in each issue? | 37.5% | 41.1% | 18.8% | 2.7% | 0% | 1.87 |

Q26. If you reported being “dissatisfied” by any of the above items, what specifically would increase your satisfaction with RRR?

Improve book reviews (n=4)

Higher quality articles (n=3)

More focus on application (n=3)

Q27. The Review of Religious Research clearly reflects the Religious Research Association's distinctive organizational mission.

Strongly Agree 30.8%

Agree 59.8%

Disagree 8.4%

Strongly Disagree 0.9%

Q28. On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being "least important" and 7 being "most important," how would you rank the importance of RRR in comparison to other professional journals you receive or read?

1 (Least Important) 0%

2 12.7%

3 10.9%

4 19.1%

5 20.0%

6 30.0%

7 (Most Important) 7.3%

Mean = 4.65

Q29. Have you submitted an article, research note, or denominational report to the journal for publication in the past four years?

Yes 42.3%

No 57.7%

Q30. Do you have any other comments regarding the journal?

Keep/expand applied focus (n=6)

Praise for editor and/or review process (n=5)

Q31. What is your gender?

Female 24.6%

Male 74.6%

Other 0.9%

Q32. What is your age?

Under 30 2.8%

30-34 5.5%

35-39 7.3%

40-44 9.2%

45-49 11.0%

50-54 8.3%

55-59 14.7%

60-64 12.8%

65-69 10.1%

70 or older 18.4%

Q33. What is your race/ethnicity?

African American/Black 3.7%

Asian 0.9%

White/Anglo 91.7%

Hispanic or Latino 0%

Native American 0%

Middle Eastern 0%

Indian 0%

Mixed 0.9%

Other 2.8%

Q34. What is your primary employment?

PhD granting institution 32.1%

MA/MS/MDiv granting institution 16.5%

4-year undergraduate institution 13.8%

2-year institution or community college 0%

Independent applied consultant 0.9%

Independent researcher 0%

Non-profit organizational administration 1.8%

Denominational research staff 10.1%

Judicatory executive/administrator/manager 0%

Parish clergy/staff 1.8%

Private sector organizational administration 0%

Other organizational research staff 5.5%

Law, medicine, journalism or other profession 0%

Student 2.8%

Retired 12.8%

Other 1.8%

Q35. With what academic discipline are you most closely affiliated?

Sociology 59.1%

Religion/Theology 13.6%

Psychology 13.6%

Political Science 2.7%

Economics 0%

Communication 1.8%

Anthropology 0.9%

Health/Medicine 0.9%

History 0%

Interdisciplinary 1.8%

Other (please specify) 5.5%

Q36. Which denomination(s) or religious tradition(s) is the primary focus of your research?

Mainline Protestantism (n=24)

Catholicism (n=15)

Evangelicalism (n=15)

Christianity (n=13)

Non-Christian religions/groups (n=4)

Q37. With what religious issue(s) is your research primary concerned?

Congregations (n=21)

Leadership (n=15)

Q38. If you live in the U.S., in what region do you currently live?

Northeast 18.7%

Midwest 28.0%

South 31.8%

West 12.2%

I live outside of the U.S. 9.4%

Other (please specify) 0%