



## RNA Salon Initiative 2019/20

Report to the RNA SOCIETY Board of Directors

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.*

### Quick Facts:

- 54 RNA Salons sponsored in 2019/20
- continued growth with 11 new RNA Salons
- in total, >6,300 RNA researchers are engaged
- \$ 1,000 USD in support by the RNA Society
- all RNA Salons can receive \$ 500 USD from Lexogen

### 1. RNA Salon: a cornerstone of RNA Society's activities

In its fourth year since inception, the RNA Salon Program is undoubtedly a flagship of the RNA Society's activities as this program succeeds in regularly engaging more than 6,000 RNA researchers worldwide. The decentralized model of the RNA Salons is clearly most effective in creating a vibrant and engaging RNA community as reported by all RNA Salon organizers. All leading RNA centers around the world now strive to have an RNA Salon as a prestigious recognition by the RNA Society. Accordingly, the number of RNA Salons continues to grow steadily (see Fig. 1), and this year we have 11 new RNA Salons including a first RNA Salon each in Shanghai and India. On the other hand, many RNA Salons are well established since several years. The RNA Society can be particularly proud of 17 RNA Salons which are active since the inception of this program in 2016 and which continue to grow their local and regional participant numbers.

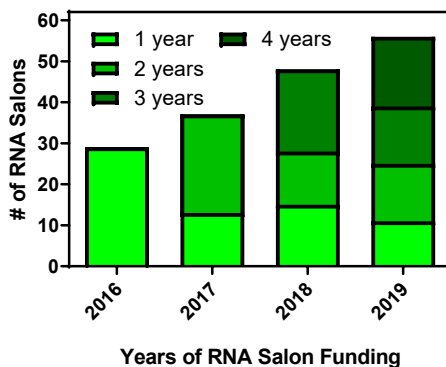


Fig. 1: Continuous growth in numbers of RNA Salons since 2016

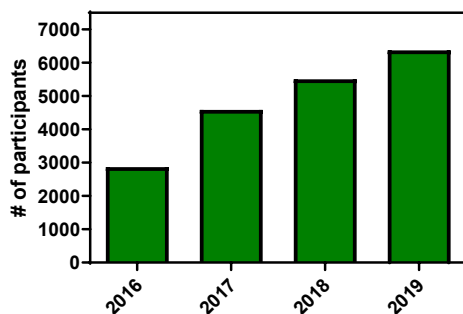


Fig. 2: Growth in numbers of RNA Salons participants since 2016.

Together, the increase in the number of RNA Salons and the increased reach of existing RNA Salons has led once again to a significant growth in the number of RNA researchers participating in RNA Salons which exceed 6,300 (Fig. 2). The engagement of so many RNA researchers is the unique strength of the RNA Salon Program! Through regular, highly accessible, and engaging local events, the RNA Salons provide networking opportunities not only for established RNA researchers, but importantly for numerous trainees in RNA research and for researchers from other fields who are discovering the importance of RNA.

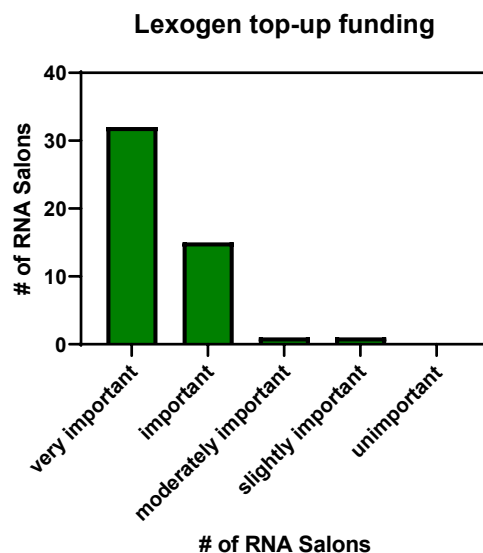
In summary, the impact of the RNA Salon program is felt both in the growing quantity of interactions among RNA researchers, but also in the high-quality of community building events. Through the RNA Salon activities, numerous researchers feel connected to and identify with the RNA Society.

*In addition to provide constructive feedback, the participants are also very open to share protocols and equipment, facilitating and rationalizing enormously everybody's research. In fact, this collegiality has seeded the path to new collaborations between labs that before the BU RNA Club would not have had the opportunity to interact. The fruit of these collaborations came in the form of awarded NIH grants and joint peer-reviewed papers. (Daniel Cifuentes, BU RNA Club)*

## 2. Lexogen collaboration

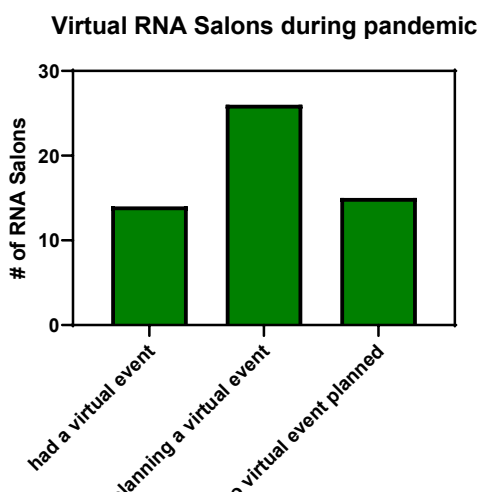
With the continued growth of the RNA Salon program, also the partnership with Lexogen was further expanded. As in the previous year, Lexogen is the exclusive sponsor of the RNA Salon Program and agreed to provide top-up funding (\$ 500 USD each) to all interested RNA Salons. Most RNA Salons (48 of 54) chose to accept this offer such that Lexogen supported this program in 2019/2020 with \$ 24,000 USD in total. The RNA Salon organizers greatly appreciate the additional financial support as 46 RNA Salon organizers rated this as “very important” or “important” for their activities (Fig. 3).

*Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we've continued the bi-weekly meeting via Zoom and attendance has doubled. (Thomas Westbrook, BCM RNA and Chromatin Group)*



**Fig. 3: RNA Salon Organizers appreciate the financial support by Lexogen.**

## 3. Virtual RNA Salons during the pandemic



**Fig. 4: RNA Salons are quickly adapting to online events during the pandemic according to a survey in early May 2020.**

Due to the pandemic and campus closures, most RNA Salons had to cancel their in-person events in the last months. However, the strength of the RNA Salon program is evident in the fact that many RNA Salon organizers are planning virtual events to continue engaging their communities! In the beginning of May, 14 RNA Salons report that they have held already virtual events, and 26 RNA Salons are actively planning virtual events for the next months (Fig. 4). Thus, the continuity and impact of the RNA Salon program is certain!

Impressively, the quick shift to virtual events and other forms of engagement has further sparked the creativity of many invested RNA Salon organizers to serve their communities. For example, RNA Salons have started to cooperate as the virtual events can be open to many communities. Besides virtual presentations, RNA Salons have also offered new types of engagements such as essay contests for the trainees. Clearly, the RNA community stays closely connected in the pandemic thanks to the RNA Salons!

## 4. Future Plans

Based on the impressive adaptability and community engagement of the RNA Salons, this program is more important than ever for the RNA Society to foster a sense of belonging and connection among its members. As a first step to guarantee the continuity of current RNA Salons, they have all been offered a one-year no-cost extension beyond October 2020. As virtual events seem to be successful and can possibly be paired with local in-person events in the next year, the RNA Salon program will be a critical tool to continue engaging RNA researchers. In the next round of RNA Salon applications, I am therefore expecting a creative mix of new activities to be proposed.

*On behalf of all RNA Salon organizers, I thank the RNA Society for their support of the RNA Salon Program! (Ute Kothe)*