



RNA Salons 2021/2022

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

After the first challenging year of the pandemic, we observe an increase in activities by the RNA Salons. Exploring new formats of engagements, the RNA Salons are providing a vibrant community to the benefit in particular of junior researchers. New this year, we were successful in setting up a two-year funding scheme which was met with great appreciation by the RNA Salon organizers. We are grateful that Lexogen has agreed to support this new funding model with matching funds in each year. In this cycle, 27 RNA Salons were selected for two-year funding (2021-2023) whereas 14 RNA Salons received one-year funding and can again apply in September 2022.

Quick Facts:

- 41 funded RNA Salons (increase from 34 in previous year)
- 27 RNA Salons selected for 2-year funding (with support from Lexogen)
- RNA Salons move to mixed / hybrid events combining online and in-person
- Increased focus on promoting equity, diversity & inclusion

New this year

2-year funding option (including Lexogen support)

*The excellent speakers invited to talk at the Hong Kong RNA Club have provided a world-wide view about RNA sciences to Hong Kong PIs, postdocs, and students, which will motivate interesting research and international collaborations to be carried out, and also offer more chances for the Hong Kong scientists to conduct cutting-edge RNA sciences at an international level. **Chun Kit Kwok, Hong Kong RNA Salon***

Many RNA Salons were interested in two-year funding which was awarded based on the merit of the application. The community appreciate this model as it provides more planning stability and reduces the administrative work for RNA Salon organizers. For the up-coming RNA Salon selection cycle, we aim to continue the partnership with Lexogen and to offer again a comparable number of two-year awards. In the long-term, we will thus have annual intakes assessing approximately half of all RNA Salons. This will also

reduce the administrative workload for the RNA Salon coordinator.

Considering equity, diversity, and inclusion

It was our goal this year to encourage RNA Salon organizers to strategically plan for mechanisms to foster equity, diversity, and inclusion. Therefore, we asked all applicants to describe the RNA Salon participants, to include a plan for increasing the diversity of researchers in their RNA Salon and to state how they foster an inclusive environment. Similarly, we asked in the annual survey in May 2022 that RNA Salon organizers describe the gender representation among their participants, whether underrepresented scientists participate and how they foster an inclusive environment. While all RNA Salons strive to be welcoming and many have a balanced gender representation, there is a wide variety how actively RNA Salons pursue this objective.

*The Aggieland RNA salon strives to be inclusive and provide diverse perspectives to generate more dynamic and engaging discussions. To ensure speaker diversity at both meetings and the end-of-year symposium, the following actions were undertaken: (1) speakers from underrepresented groups were invited first and adjust the days/time of the event to allow participation; (2) we included trainee-invited speakers to allow trainees to choose speakers that best represented themselves; and (3) invite speakers were asked to describe their personal science journey. Additionally, the capstone Aggieland RNA Research Award will be awarded (event takes place May 27th) to two participants from different genders (as we have done in the past). **Jonathan Szczepanski, Aggieland RNA Salon***

The hybrid future of engagement

Interestingly, there is a wide variety of different activities offered by the RNA Salons which foreshadows a new model of engagement based on our experiences in the pandemic. Where allowed, many RNA Salons return to in-person activities which benefit the local communities and trainees. In addition, the vast majority of RNA Salons also continues to use online events which provide additional benefits: many RNA Salons share that attendance at online events is higher as accessibility is higher. Moreover, online events allow them to invite international speakers without cost barrier. In addition, RNA Salons are collaborating virtually with joint events such as the RNA Collaborative Seminar Series. Some RNA Salons also report that they have successfully set up hybrid events.

*We have a short talk from the PI of a lab followed by a talk from a trainee. The benefits of holding such sessions on Zoom are many-more people from around the world have been participating and we can recruit amazing speakers from around the world (who would otherwise not be able to travel, or we could not afford to pay for their travel!). The benefits of our format are also great-we get to hear a talk from both a PI and a trainee, giving us two different perspectives on work in a given lab! Fun! The relationship between the mentor and mentee generally shines through, and sets a good example for positive mentorship relationships for the audience, too. **Julie Claycomb, Toronto RNA Club***

Strong student support

The RNA Salon annual reports speak clearly to the importance of RNA Salon activities for trainees. Indeed, typically more than 50% of the participants of an RNA Salon are graduate students, and the RNA Salons have established many creative ways to support students. In the last years, many RNA Salons have added more student awards to their budget which may recognize presentations, essays, or leadership. They also continue to emphasize the huge impact of the three free trainee RNA Society membership that each RNA Salon receives.

In addition to the positive impact of the RNA Club describe above, it also allowed postdoc and PhD student co-organizers (...) to significantly improve their organizational, communication, and leadership skills.

**Andrzej Dziembowski, RNA Club
Warsaw**

We have established a coaching system, in which past presenters (senior PhD students or postdocs) help the next presenter improve his or her seminar. That way, the general quality of the presentations improves, while more interactions between RNA researchers of different labs and institutes are promoted.

Raul Ortiz, Basel RNA Club

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May 20th, 2022