

RESEARCH AND INTEREST GROUPS POLICY MANUAL

What functions do RIGs serve?

From the RSS website:

Research and Interest Groups (RIGs) reflect the substantive interests of RSS Members and serve as an important avenue for connecting members with similar interests. RIGs serve a critical role in RSS including: identifying, developing, and recruiting for the annual RSS conference; planning special events, speakers, field trips for the annual conference; providing intellectual leadership in their respective areas; rewarding achievement through internal awards and recognitions; and creating opportunities for members, particularly graduate students, to network and identify colleagues with similar interests.

RSS currently has 14 RIGs. These RIGs are:

- Applied and Extension
- Community, Health, and Family
- Gender and Sexualities
- International Development and Studies
- Natural Resources (NRRG)
- Population
- Rural Policy
- Rural Poverty
- Rural Race and Ethnicity
- Rural Studies
- Senior Rural Sociologists
- Sociology of Agriculture and Food (SAFRIG)
- Teaching and Curriculum
- Youth, Education, and Rural Vitality

According to the RSS Bylaws, the Vice President of RSS is in charge of matters related to RIGs, while the Business Office can answer questions related to finances.

Holding Annual RIG Business Meetings

To remain in good standing with RSS, all RIGs are expected to hold an annual business meeting to discuss RIG-specific activities or issues, approve plans to spend the RIG budget, and to elect their leadership. RIG business meetings are typically held during a designated time slot at the

annual meeting. Some RIGs are exploring other options (such as organizing virtual business meetings just prior to or after the annual meeting) or holding their business meetings over a lunch or dinner slot at the annual meeting. If a business meeting is held at an alternate location, RIG chairs should coordinate with the program chair well in advance so the location is in the program. If a RIG wants food from the hotel during the meeting, the meeting must be on site.

Selecting RIG leadership

RIGs have varying leadership structures, including a single chair or co-chairs who serve staggered 2 year terms. Some RIGs have subcommittees for special activities such as paper awards or field trips. RIGs may also choose to have a student representative. Nominations or volunteers for leadership positions are typically solicited during the RIG business meeting. If enough members are present they may vote for the chair during the business meeting. However, if attendance at the RIG business meeting is low, a RIG may conduct a leadership vote electronically.

RIGs are expected to provide a brief report to the VP and Business Office after their annual business meeting regarding RIG leadership election results and other details about RIG activities.

Planning RIG sessions for RSS annual meeting.

RIG chairs serve as the core members of the Annual Meeting Program Committee (under the leadership of the Program Committee Chair, who is appointed by the RSS President).

One of the most important tasks of the RIG chair (and co-chair, if there is one) is to create paper sessions from a list of abstracts submitted for consideration for the RSS annual meeting. All submitted abstracts are organized by the business office and sent out to individual RIGs based on information provided by the author or an assessment of fit based on content. RIG chair and co-chairs are responsible for putting papers with a similar theme into sessions (typically 4-5 papers per session), naming the session, and assigning a session moderator (often a volunteer from the RIG's members). They return this information to the business office which works with the Program Committee to finalize the program. Note that the Program Chair(s) have the final word on the time and date for all sessions, but you can share any suggestions for timing or sequencing of sessions when you submit your list of proposed sessions.

After examining each paper's title and abstract, it is not uncommon for RIG chairs to decide that one or more papers may fit better in a different RIG. If there is one or more papers that do not fit into your created sessions, try contacting the chair of a different RIG that you think it fits best to see if they will fit in the paper. If all else fails, contact the program chair(s) and let them know you are having trouble finding a place for the paper. Sometimes, papers are hard to place but every effort is made to find a session for each paper submission.

Also know that some authors will withdraw their paper from the conference and others may be added by the business office to your RIG sessions to fill holes. It's best to be flexible realizing

that your first attempt at configuring sessions will most likely be changed slightly before the start of the conference.

Communication among RIG members

RIGs are intended to help RSS members with common interests connect, collaborate, and communicate.

RIG chairs and members have embraced this role in various ways. Some RIGs communicate with members primarily through email list serves and at their annual business meeting. Other RIGs are more very proactive and develop regular newsletters, maintain websites, or have a social media presence. For example, the Natural Resources RIG newsletter includes details about the new leadership, award winners, award guidelines, member announcements, call for papers, employment opportunities, and opportunities for graduate students, among other items. Chairs may also decide to communicate with members via social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter.

To facilitate communication among members of the RIGs, the Business Office provides RIG chairs with regular updates about the names and contact information for their active members. Most RIGs maintain a historic record of past RIGs to facilitate communication with (often temporarily) inactive members as well as those whose memberships are up to date.

While it is up to the RIG chairs, and their members, to decide what and how much they want to communicate with members, communication and activity are probably correlated with more active RIGS having more and diverse modes of communication.

How do RIGs earn money?

Currently RIGs earn money through membership dues that are collected by RSS when people pay for or renew their annual membership. Member dues are set by each RIG and range from \$0 (usually for graduate students only) to \$15 annually.

Some RIGs have taken it upon themselves to solicit additional funds from individual or institutional sponsors for specific items such as a paper award or to bring in a speaker for a special session.

In recent years, the Rural Sociological Society's budget has included money for special events or sessions at the annual meeting that are proposed by RIGs. There are also funds to support activities at the annual meeting that promote the society's goals of increasing diversity and inclusion. As noted below, RIGs might plan events that require funds beyond the income they earn from membership dues – and can apply for RIG meeting activity or diversity enhancement funds to help cover these costs. Pay attention to calls for proposals from the VP and Business Office for these types of activities.

How can RIGs spend money?

Each month the business office sends two spreadsheets to RIG chairs and co-chairs. The first spreadsheet is a list of members. The second spreadsheet is a current balance of how much money is in each RIG's account. RIG balances can accumulate over several years if the funds are not spent. Because most money comes from RIG membership dues, the RIG bank account usually see increases around the time that people renew their RSS membership (early in the calendar year) or when paying for registration to the annual meeting (summer). This can make it difficult to know precisely how much the RIG will have to spend.

RIGs are allowed to spend their budgets for purposes consistent with the mission and goals of the RSS and the specific RIG. They must follow guidelines from the Business Office about appropriate expenditures. Questions about appropriate expenditures can be directed to the RSS Executive Committee.

After determining how much money the RIG has to spend, the RIG chair and co-chair can begin to plan RIG related activities.

Below are some examples of what RIGs choose to finance:

Paper awards.

Several RIGs hold annual paper awards. These awards tend to include a financial award ranging from \$200 to \$400. The financial award is to help offset some of the costs of attending the annual meeting as award recipients are typically expected to present their paper in a RIG session.

Field Trips.

RIGs often work individually or collectively to organize field trips at the annual meetings. These field trips are traditionally held on the Thursday before the official start of the meeting. RIGs could also co-sponsor a field trip and therefore share the cost. Field trip costs are offset by participant fees; however, RIG funds can be used to cover some of the costs to keep field trip fees lower. Field trips greatly vary in cost (depending on transportation used and fees associated with the destination) so it is best to plan for the minimum number of participants needed and to calculate a rough estimate of how much the RIG will contribute. The Business Office can help RIGs work out the logistics associated with field trips. It is best to contact the Business Office early so that they can maximize resources and make contracting processes efficient (for example, to have all buses for multiple field trips on one contract).

RIG Business meeting.

Some RIGs decide to hold their business meeting during lunch or happy hour and provide their members with appetizers and/or drinks. One benefit of doing this is that it tends to increase the attendance rate of the RIG business meeting. This is entirely up to the discretion of the RIG chair and co-chair, but needs to be communicated with the program chair so that the time and place is correct in the program.

Bring in speakers for special sessions at the annual meeting.

RIG chairs may choose to develop special sessions or panel sessions on a specific theme. In some cases, speakers in these special sessions may be RSS members who were planning on attending the meeting. In these cases, RIG chairs set up the special session but do not need to pay speakers. However, in other cases, RIG chairs may invite speakers who are not RSS members to speak at a special session or to be part of a panel. Typically, these special speakers are close to the annual meeting site and do not require travel funds. However, they would need to purchase a 1 day registration pass. RIG funds could be used to pay the 1 day registration fees for these speakers.

Guidelines for paper awards

It is up to the discretion of the RIG chair and co-chair to determine guidelines for a paper award. However, if the RIG has held the paper award in the past, efforts should be taken to keep the guidelines the same unless the RIG members vote to change a particular aspect of the award. Some RIGs have chosen to create a special sub-committee to solicit papers and determine winners.

A good timeline to use is to announce the award in October (send the call for submissions to the business office so they can include it on the website and in the email announcements), set the deadline for submissions in early May and notify winners and the RSS Business Office by early June. The Business Office needs to have the names of winners by June 10th in order to get their names in the printed program book.

The call for papers should outline the paper competition guidelines (e.g. who is eligible, length of paper, content) and clear instructions for submission. If a RIG decides to form a new paper competition, chairs may want to look at the call for papers created by other RIGs.

Guidelines for field trips

Some RIGs choose to develop a field trip to coincide with the annual meetings. Traditionally, the field trip takes place the day before the meetings start. Below are several points to consider when planning a RIG Field Trip.

- *Develop a sub-committee.* Organizing a field trip can be quite complex and will include a wide ranges of questions and possibilities. The person taking on this task will need help.
- *Don't procrastinate!* A successful field trip encompasses many small details that simply cannot be worked out at the last minute. These points will impact everything from the budget, to informing the RSS membership, and returning from the trip with everyone that you left with.

- *Understand your budget.* Determine whether or not your RIG will use existing funds and/or charge a participation fee. If a fee is to be charged, consider the potential cost for students; some RIGs choose to subsidize students. Other financial considerations include, but are not limited to, transportation, water and/or snacks during travel, an honorarium for the host(s), and lunch accommodations.
- *Solicit member input.* The annual meetings of the RSS take place in a different region and city each year. Thus, the field trip options may vary greatly from one year to the next. Members may wish to addend a trip that is linked to a special session during the meetings, relevant to the meeting location, or something entirely different. Once a RIG has settled on a few potential trip ideas, consider collaborating with other RIGS who may have similar interests.
- *Strength in numbers.* Some field trip options may require a certain number of participants. The opposite may also be true in that each potential venue may have a maximum number of people that can be accommodated. Thus, it may be necessary to poll RIG members to gauge the number of potential field trip participants, and to decide if the field trip will be open to the entire RSS membership or just the RIG members.
- *Time management.* In choosing an activity, it will be necessary to determine the distance to and from the venue, as well as adequate time for the activity itself. If the field trip will be an all-day excursion, include time for lunch. Depending on the location and venue, the RIG may also choose to schedule in extra time for rest, site exploration, and/or networking. However, do not forget to return early enough for participants to attend the opening session of the conference.
- *Inform your colleagues.* Advertising the field trip, before conference registration is open, is an essential aspect of encouraging member participation. There are multiple venues available—RIG e-mail lists, RSS Facebook, and the RSS eBulletin.
- *Know your participants.* Depending on the activity, the transportation, and associated costs, it may be very important to know exactly who has signed up. Some members may have mobility issues and need accommodations. If a meal is included in the trip, it will be important to know about dietary restrictions, as well.