



RSA Strategy

2026-30

(Draft)

Shaping regional
development, mobilising
regional research

Who we are

The RSA is an international, interdisciplinary community for regional research, development and policy. We:

- advance regional studies by supporting regional researchers and disseminating regional research; and
- demonstrate the value of regional research to society by connecting research evidence to policy and practice.



Purpose

To advance regional research and enable its use for the benefit of people and places across the world.



Vision

For policies and practices affecting regional development to be shaped by robust research evidence.



Values

- Regional thinking – because a focus on place is integral to effective public policy and practice
- Interdisciplinary research – because working with integrity across disciplines is necessary to tackle complex global and regional challenges
- Community and collaboration – because working together across borders and boundaries nurtures individuals and fosters insight to regional issues
- Openness and inclusion – because inclusion brings diverse perspectives and creates equity within the regional studies community and beyond
- Social and environmental responsibility – because our knowledge and actions should contribute to a more just and sustainable future for all



Strategic Priorities 2026-30

1. **Champion high-quality regional research**
2. **Strengthen regional research and knowledge networks**
3. **Grow and diversify the regional studies community**
4. **Contribute to a just and sustainable future**

Strategic Priority 1: Champion high-quality regional research

What RSA members tell us:

Scientific excellence and interdisciplinarity underpin the legitimacy of the RSA and the value of regional research. The roles played by RSA conferences and journals in sharing knowledge, and our support for new knowledge creation through research grants, are viewed very positively. Nevertheless, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and students describe the challenge of developing researcher identities and establishing themselves professionally within such a diverse, interdisciplinary field. The availability of regional data is another issue, especially for those early in their careers and in the global south.

The RSA's record in connecting research to policy and practice is highly valued. Members acknowledge the importance of foundational, critical and problem-posing research to the development of the field. However, they regard working with and influencing policymaking at all stages - from ideation to implementation - and at scales from the local to international, as a key priority for the RSA. Members wish to see the RSA strengthen its role as an advocate for regional studies: to better communicate the importance of a regional perspective to university leaders, policy makers, and in the public realm.

This poses challenges to the Association: to identify the role of regional research in addressing pressing societal questions, such as inequality and the implications of climate change for cities and regions; to find ways to synthesise and communicate the work being done across the community; and to bring policymakers, practitioners and researchers together to enable knowledge translation and the integration of research evidence into policy and practice.

What we want to achieve

We want to advance research that helps address the complex challenges facing societies around the world, through its focus on regions and the regional scale. By 2030, we want the value of a regional lens to be more widely acknowledged, at scales from the local to the supra-national. In measurable terms, we want to:

- ✓ Communicate arguments for and examples of the value of regional studies, evidencing their use by members and others
- ✓ Grow the visibility, readership, use and impact of RSA publications
- ✓ Use an RSA regional research strategy to focus on the most compelling questions facing regions and to bring this research to the attention of policymakers, practitioners and the wider public
- ✓ Increase opportunities for regional researchers to interact with professionals working in regional management and development at local, regional, national and international scales
- ✓ Highlight cases where high-quality regional research drives and shapes public policy and professional practice
- ✓ Increase the availability of data for regional researchers by exploiting the opportunities offered by open data approaches to research and publishing

Strategic Priority 2: Strengthen regional research and knowledge networks

What RSA members tell us:

The quality of relationships is widely described as the most valuable feature of the RSA. Relationships engender trust – thereby enabling the sharing and co-creation of knowledge - and over the long term, the support of a like-minded community sustains people morally and psychologically. Networks, both formal and informal, provide the infrastructure that allow relationships to flourish; wide networks also help reduce the risk of parochialism in regional research.

Building professional networks can be particularly difficult for new entrants to the field and for those working in peripheral locations or the global south. For some members, higher education funding constraints are further limiting opportunities for networking. For others, geopolitical conflicts are disrupting international collaborations, inhibiting cross border and inter-network exchanges. Members experience the RSA as a supportive and approachable community. Our ability to create and support networks and to create dialogues across international borders is highly valued, although there is a desire to strengthen the links between colleagues in the global north and south. More networking opportunities through RSA conferences and other activities would be welcomed, especially informal networking opportunities, and opportunities to connect with people of similar career stage or research interests.

What we want to achieve

By 2030, we want regional researchers across the world to have better access to RSA territorial, research or other networks that meet their needs; we also want to strengthen connections between these RSA networks. In measurable terms, we want to:

- ✓ Grow the number of RSA Research Networks (RNs) and Territorial Networks (TNs), the numbers participating in these networks and the collaborative opportunities offered, including opportunities for collaboration across global regions
- ✓ Increase opportunities for informal networking through RSA conferences and events, with opportunities tailored to identified needs (career stage and research interests)
- ✓ Provide new RSA members with personalised support for building relationships and networks
- ✓ Offer informal networking and collaboration opportunities as a benefit of RSA membership.
- ✓ Deliver enhanced support to students, ECRs and Regional Researchers-at-Risk to (re)build professional networks

Strategic Priority 3:

Grow and diversify the regional studies community

What RSA members tell us:

Members view the scale and diversity of the regional studies community as strengths; its interdisciplinary nature and the variety of perspectives this brings is regarded as 'part of our DNA'. The Association is seen as being highly responsive to members' needs and supportive of members' initiatives, such as the Women's Network. The provision for students and ECRs is seen as particularly important by those in every career stage. As it grows as an international association, members wish to see continued progress away from UK or Eurocentrism and towards a truly global outlook. The correction of structural inequalities through support for the work and careers of female academics and those working in the global south is also seen as a priority. As for the breadth of member benefits and the way we communicate our offer: busy academics and professionals find it challenging to keep informed about the range of RSA benefits, or those activities most relevant to their work.



What we want to achieve

We want the RSA to be regarded by all those working on regions and cities as their natural professional home. In measurable terms, by 2030 we want to:

✓ Increase the RSA's total membership by recruiting and retaining more members

✓ Tailor the member offer and member communications to the professional needs of individuals

✓ Diversify the membership in respect of: research, practice or policy backgrounds; discipline; methodological approaches; geographical location; career stage; and gender

✓ Make the uptake of services across different groups of members more equitable

✓ Widen contributions towards grant applications, conference presentations and publication authorship

✓ Promote inclusive practices within the Association and across the regional and urban research community

Strategic Priority 4:

Contribute to a just and sustainable future

What RSA members tell us:

RSA members are deeply attuned to questions of social and environmental sustainability and possess significant expertise in sustainable development. Although they recognise some of the progress made in recent years, members want RSA services to be offered in ways that further reduce environmental impacts and for the work of the Association to contribute to more a just and sustainable future more broadly.

From a professional perspective, many members describe how a building a career studying regions can feel like a precarious activity, and one increasingly under threat from budget constraints in higher education. These members would value career guidance and professional recognition from the RSA and – in some cases – advice on research careers outside of academia. For others, intensifying workloads may in future squeeze the time available to contribute to RSA committees or other activities.

What we want to achieve

We want the RSA to operate in an environmentally sustainable fashion, to promote the sustainable use of its services and to mobilise its expertise to help with just and green regional transitions. At the same time, we want to secure the long-term future of the regional studies community, by helping regional scholars and managers develop their careers and by widening participation in RSA committees and other activities. In measurable terms, by 2030 we want to:

- ✓ Set out a clear pathway to carbon neutrality for the RSA
- ✓ Grow the contribution of RSA research towards just and green regional transitions
- ✓ Offer RSA members valuable career and professional development guidance appropriate to their needs
- ✓ Support and supplement the professional development of regional researchers and managers
- ✓ Make voluntary and other forms of contribution to the life of the Association more attractive and rewarding

Your feedback and comments
are important to us. Fill out our
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