RSA Digital Summit: Insights & Recommendations

Prepared by: Ann Longley, 26 Jan 2021
With support from:
Peter Clitheroe, Yasmine Boudiaf and 60+ Fellow Participants
CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Recap of current state
3. Why we need to leap ahead
4. Summary of Summit Insights
5. Recommendations
CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Recap of current state
3. Why we need to leap ahead
4. Summary of Summit Insights
5. Recommendations
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RSA held an inaugural Digital Summit on 16 October 2020 to inform its digital strategy and plans to improve its Fellowship Experience (FX). Digital experts were invited to share their ideas relating to six themes. 66 Fellows attended the three hour design event (see Appendix).

The event was Fellow-led and staff supported, a model and ethos many Fellows believe signifies an effective way forward.

This report* distills the Summit’s insights and ideas and provides recommendations for next steps.

*This report was created by reviewing video transcripts for each breakout group to identify patterns and conclusions. The report was also peer reviewed.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital Summit Focus*

- Make it easier for Fellows to connect with each other & connect to what is on offer (as soon as possible)
- Define and provide the best possible digital tools for changemakers (longer term)
- Deliver value for money with a strong business case for investing in digital – critical for the RSA’s sustainability
- Avoid past pitfalls of focusing too much on tech by putting people at the forefront of the strategy
- Adopt a ‘fellow-centric design approach’
- Work as ‘one organisation’; RSA staff to support Fellows’ social improvement interests

*The Summit, with its specific focus on technology, experience design and Fellow engagement, aimed to compliment commissioned research.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conclusions: The need to improve the FX digitally is long overdue. The Summit participants unanimously agreed that the RSA has a tremendous opportunity to unlock the potential of its 30,000+ strong Fellowship to increase its impact.

The RSA is currently not effectively grasping this opportunity.

To do so effectively, will require digital and cultural transformation.
The Fellows would like the RSA to do more than move from ‘broadcast’ to ‘engagement’ (the RSA’s stated intention); they seek ‘empowerment’.*

Fellowship empowerment, supported by the best possible digital tools, will require an enormous mindset shift and new ways of working.

Thus, the digital strategy is not just of a technical nature

- It requires a clear vision informed by Fellows
- Inclusive Fellow-centric leadership behaviours
- Collaboration with the Digital Steering Group and the Fellowship Council to implement.

*Empowerment means authority and agency to act with minimal friction and gatekeeping,
# SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPROVEMENT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlock the Fellowship to realise the RSA's USP</td>
<td>Technology can enable and augment the RSA's impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek empowerment, not just engagement</td>
<td>The RSA does not need to build its own platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A convening and design approach is needed</td>
<td>Our impact is not being optimised by data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**RSA**

[Logo](#)
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **New Mindsets & Behaviours Will Unlock the Fellowship Potential**
- **Convene the RSA Way and Adapt Proven Design Principles**
- **Optimise Our Impact with Insights from Data**
- **Leverage Existing Tech**
- **Define an Empowerment Vision and Roadmap**
- **To Maximise Impact Align Tech with RSA Strategy**
SUMMARY OF IMMEDIATE ACTIONS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

- Stop focusing on technology only
- Define value proposition & improve FX journeys
- Adopt new mindsets and modern ways of working
- Test, validate & refine vision & roadmap with Fellows
- Agree what good looks like
- Conduct experiments to actively engage Fellows
- Evaluate lessons learned from the past
ILLUSTRATIVE ROADMAP

Engage with Fellowship Council; adopt an agile service design approach

Start with the end in mind (backcast from a clear vision / north star co-designed with Fellows)

Review what we’ve learned (e.g. IEN, RSA USA), the assets we can leverage; agree and hone our convening methodology

Select MVP focus (problem framing) including new behaviours & tech in a kick off workshop with Fellows

Scope and validate the pilots MVP(s) with Fellows

Run series of pilots / experiments

Evaluate pilots based on clear goals

Work openly to build a movement (GDS* model) sharing progress on RSA website and social channels

Regularly convene with Fellowship Council and activists

Work with the Marketing, Fellowship Engagement and Research teams to redesign the Fellowship experience in a joined up way

Develop corporate partnerships within the tech sector

Explore corporate partnership with Microsoft (e.g. run a design workshop / hackathon)

Cultivate sponsored residencies to cover skill gaps, e.g. Data Scientist in Residence

Keep improving the Fellowship experience with ongoing feedback and optimisation

Continuous staff development in service design and Fellowship empowerment

*Government Digital Service (GDS)
CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Recap of current state
3. Why we need to leap ahead
4. Summary of Summit Insights
5. Recommendations
THE FX* NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

*By FX we mean the end-to-end journey or Fellowship Experience from awareness through to becoming and being a Fellow

It is fragmented — activity takes place on many platforms

It is not easy to connect with other Fellows and sign-posting is poor

It lags behind expectations and its potential
CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Recap of current state
3. Why we need to leap ahead
4. Summary of Summit Insights
5. Recommendations
GETTING IT RIGHT IS MISSION CRITICAL

COVID–19 has disrupted the RSA’s traditional face-to-face model

- Digital has a critical role to play in supporting the RSA’s mission now and in the future
- Digital tools for changemakers can help the RSA punch above its weight and remain relevant

To leap ahead, lay the foundations for successful digital and cultural transformation
HOW MIGHT WE LEAP AHEAD?

Tap into the collective wisdom of the Fellowship and empower it

Give Fellows a strong reason to want to connect — make it easy

Lead (within our means) – to ensure relevance and maximise impact
FELLOWS HAVE A DESIRE TO LEARN ABOUT EFFECTIVE CHANGE AND ACCESS SUPPORT

“A big reason for joining is having access to networks one wouldn’t have otherwise.”
Yemi Adeola, Fellowship Councillor, 2020

“Don’t just provide funds, provide access to know-how and expertise”
Dino Myers-Lamptey, FRSA, The Barber Shop Founder

Yemi Adeola, Fellowship Councillor, 2020
THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF THE FELLOWSHIP IS UNTAPPED*

A Vision For The Digital RSA:
A 'world' where infinite combinations of unique and creative talent are brought to bear (convened) to tackle a wide range of societal challenges and opportunities. At the same time a ‘space’ for wondering and invention. Individuals encountering increased levels of ‘serendipity’ within a deliberately designed ecosystem/ecology. We described this as a push/pull model.”

— John Caswell*

*John Caswell of Group Partners synthesising the conclusions of the Virtual Coffee House breakout group
DIGITAL TOOLS AND DATA CAN HELP THE RSA SCALE ITS IMPACT

“How do we make ‘connected problem solving’ the norm — the RSA’s ‘killer app’?”

Jonathan Tavss, FRSA, Co-Founder of the RSA’s Augmented Society Network

Let’s grasp this opportunity to have exponential impact.

Image Source: Jonathan Tavss, Founder of Kaleidoko Ltd, presenting The Majority Report
Technology on its own is not enough. Knowing how technology can be applied to augment humanity is what makes it work.

“We realised a design methodology was needed to ensure the power of technology solves real human problems”

Mike Butcher, MBE, Founder of Techfugees, TechCrunch Editor
CONNECTING IS HARD

People join to be part of a community, but it is not easy to crack the RSA Fellowship code.

We are not empowered to connect. My RSA has limited functionality and no clear value proposition.

The Fellow’s Forum and other groups are not promoted and so under-utilised. Not all groups are actively managed. Many platforms are used with no single sign on.
The RSA is good at broadcasting content and has won awards for it. It now wants to shift to digital engagement.

Fellows want empowerment.

Who decides what we need and how do we begin to shift towards co-designing the future state?
BELONGING IS CRUCIAL

“My big need, is that the platform or whatever we do next, it's got to make people proud to be a member of the RSA. It's got to give a sense of belonging … and it's got to allow the RSA to evolve”

Don McLaverty, Fellowship Councillor Chair

Fellowship Councillors are Connectors who can help accelerate transformation.
AN EMERGENT SPACE FOR IDEAS TO FORM IS IN DEMAND

‘Forced serendipity’ (connections between Fellows with different backgrounds and interests) can help drive and inspire new thinking.

Creating an emergent space for new ideas relies on an open empathetic mentality and cultivating ecosystems.

How do we foster a space for 'free-ranging' conversations that allows for balanced discourse and productive outcomes and action?

The RSA can develop and hone its approach to convening with experiments building on what has worked elsewhere (e.g. Taiwan).

*Several groups discussed the importance of an emergent space expertly convened by the RSA
DON’T SHY AWAY FROM DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

“Having better conversations will help us change better.”
Dino Myers-Lamptey, FRSA, Founder, The Barber Shop

The previous Fellows’ platform was not smart or intuitive — how can we build changemaking intelligence into the next generation platform?
WE’RE NOT MEASURING IMPACT

The Innovation Education Network (IEN) adds value using the network effect.*

- It matched a school in New York with a learning opportunity with the Chester Zoo – transcending geography to fill an educational need

We can’t effectively harness this potential without measuring and promoting it. Better signposting will augment network performance.

*The ‘network effect’ is a phenomenon whereby increased numbers of people involved continuously improve the value of a thing.
THE DIGITAL OPPORTUNITY IS A NEW WAY OF BEING

Improving the Fellowship experience and unlocking the potential of the Fellowship as a network is as much about mindset shifts and new behaviours, as it is about technology.

Focus attention on customer experience, value propositions and better signposting.

Base further investment on proof of concepts that focus on behaviours not just technology.
SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

- Unlock the Fellowship to realise the RSA’s USP
- Technology can enable and augment the RSA’s impact
- Seek empowerment not just engagement

- A convening and design approach is needed
- Our impact is not being optimised by data
- The RSA does not need to build its own platform
CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Recap of current state
3. Why we need to leap ahead
4. Summary of Summit Insights
5. Recommendations
HARNESS THE COMMITMENT OF FELLOWS TO BUILD A MOVEMENT

The RSA has an incredible network of Fellows who want to get involved, and do more than pay their fee

- To boost Fellow satisfaction and create a beautiful experience, tap into the wisdom of the Fellowship.

- Many Fellows are willing and able to act as an extension of the RSA team — the Summit proved their talents can be harnessed. Hold the next design workshop as soon as possible.
ATTRACT AND RETAIN FELLOWS AND PARTNERS WITH PARTICIPATORY EVENTS

The RSA can engage new and lapsed fellows whilst bolstering its digital skills through events like the RSA Digital Summit.

- Attendees of the Summit such as Phil Harvey, a Solutions Architect, from Microsoft, expressed interest in future opportunities with the RSA including hackathons.

- Prospective fellow Trisha Brandon, wrote a blog post. Several lapsed fellows including Heleana Quartey and John Caswell also participated and shared content.
Handling 30,000+ agendas can be challenging

Establish clear priorities and communicate openly to manage expectations and model new behaviours

Involve Fellows in experiments that are evaluated openly so we can all learn what works.

*Working openly by sharing projects and progress is another aspect of the GDS approach that the RSA can adopt.*
Ecosystems accelerate change:

The RSA has a unique opportunity to apply technology in the pursuit of positive social and environmental impacts. Technology can automate and augment access to relevant expertise and networks.

An ecosystem approach can be applied to enrich existing initiatives like Catalyst and core research programmes.

Provide the best possible tools to help change-makers connect to the help and support they need.

*The breakout groups identified many ways to improve the current FX experience and programmes like catalyst. See Appendix.*
CREATE A LEARNING LAB POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY

“Our fellowship is made up of the most extraordinary influencers, visionaries, thinkers, experts, doers. Imagine if we could unlock the problem-solving potential. Imagine if our RSA could become a living lab for deliberative democracy — enabled by technology — where we could share our learnings openly, so the country and the world can learn from our experience.”

Katz Kiely. FRSA, Founder, Beep and Frontline.live
BASE THE PROPOSITION FOR THE NEW PLATFORM ON FELLOWS’ NEEDS*

I want to make an impact

I am looking for meaningful connections

I want to raise my own profile and share stories of my work

I want to find out about projects that I could collaborate on

I’m here for the buzz, to be part of stimulating debates, meet interesting people

*Alex Mecklenburg’s preliminary research for the Virtual Coffee House breakout group she facilitated
A STRONG VISION WILL MOBILISE A MOVEMENT

Setting a direction of travel that everyone wants to get behind will build momentum, generate participation, and help new behaviours take root.

Although the strategy may evolve, start somewhere based on a clear hypothesis.

The RSA with its Fellows can determine the best way forward by conducting experiments and finding out what works. The vision can be refined over time based on what works and gains traction.

Image Source: John Caswell, Group Partners
The Learning Lab breakout group, facilitated by Lord Jim Knight, FRSA, explored a vision for a college of informal learning that is action focused and has peer networking at its heart. It integrates the learner journey work that the RSA is doing, acknowledges that we've got lots of great content, but creates greater accessibility to it and to Fellows.

“Motivating Fellows to want to engage, to properly engage with their profiles and be able to become accessible themselves (without it becoming a directory), but through a beautiful user experience that allows us to release the richness of peer-to-peer learning and keeps us motivated.”

"Lord Jim Knight" summing up ideas from the Learning Lab breakout group
GAIN INSPIRATION FROM THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE*

Tortoise Media: Democratises the media agenda
VTaiwan: Troll-proofs democracy
Bellingcat: Global collaboration to combat human rights abuses
Kalido.me: Speed dating and professional match-making
Sensemaker: Overcoming bias by harnessing self-signified distributed cognition
Strava: Tracking progress & recognising achievements

*These are just some of the exemplars identified during the Summit
“Yemi said that he’s met more people in this digital summit than he’s met before. **Why not scale up this kind of experience?** Actually, this is a really great way to get to know (almost like you are speed dating) all the fellows.

You’re just like chatting to them and really quickly getting a feel for what they’re about. And yeah, it’s really nice.”

**Jemima Gibbons, Fellowship Councillor, 2012**

*Comments refer to working in pairs in the RSA as a platform breakout group during the Summit*
INVEST IN SERVICE DESIGN

Follow / adapt the proven GDS approach and principles to designing digital services.

- Support existing staff initially with an external expert to transfer knowledge.

- Recommended roles for the service design team include Business Owner, Delivery Manager, Agile Coach, Technical Lead, Product Manager, Digital Service Designer, UX designer, User Researcher, Data Analyst, Content Designer, Content Creator, Community Manager.
CONVENE TO BE GREATER THAN THE SUM OF OUR PARTS

Platforms in the past haven't worked when they've not been staff supported and actively managed.

Share The RSA's ‘Living Change’ methodology with Fellows so it can be applied to their initiatives.

Accelerate change and unleash the network effect by convening the RSA way.
USE INSIGHTS FROM DATA-TO-TRANSFORM

Audit the existing landscape:

● What Fellowship activity can we leverage?
● What have we learned about what works?
● How do we measure success and optimise impact?

Engage with current activists via the Fellowship Council*. Focus on incremental improvements and next steps — define the MVP(s) with them.

*Fellowship Councillor, Clare Gage to join Digital Steering Group from Feb 2021
AI CAN HELP US LEARN WHAT WORKS

Learning how to harness AI to analyse data can open up new opportunities for the RSA

- Gathering and sharing data with communities may empower them to make decisions
- We can learn about effective changemaking from our archive
- Build this intelligence into our platform

Source: Phil Harvey, Microsoft
DON'T REINVENT THE WHEEL

Explore how existing tech can be plugged into our platform using APIs; seamlessly stitch toolsets together when possible with a single sign-on (SSO).

Base further investments in technology on proof of concepts that focus on behaviours not just technology.

Focus attention on quick wins including improving the Fellow Experience, empowering value propositions, and brilliant basics like signposting.
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

NEW MINDSETS & BEHAVIOURS WILL UNLOCK THE FELLOWSHIP POTENTIAL

TO MAXIMISE IMPACT ALIGN TECH WITH RSA STRATEGY

DEFINE AN EMPOWERMENT VISION AND ROADMAP

CONVENE THE RSA WAY AND ADAPT PROVEN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

OPTIMISE OUR IMPACT WITH INSIGHTS FROM DATA

LEVERAGE EXISTING TECH
APPENDIX: SUMMIT THEMES, INTENTIONS, PARTICIPANTS, AND OUTPUTS
THE SUMMIT THEMES

Descriptions and links to artifacts

**RSA as a platform**
—an open accessible inclusive platform and digital toolset for Fellows to use to develop their own collaborative initiatives (decentralised) and for the RSA’s research teams to use to engage Fellows on the programmatic work of the RSA (centralised).

Katz Kiely provocation
Jamboard

**RSA Navigator**
— how to crack the RSA code and get the most out the RSA / how might it work / how can the RSA make it easier for Fellows to make the most of what is on offer and attract support for their own initiatives? How can RSA make the experience more personalised and improve it as it gets to know Fellows better?

Heleana Blackwell provocation
Jamboard

**RSA Virtual Coffee House**
— how do we use digital to recreate the serendipity associated with attending the RSA’s Coffee House and networking events? How can we create / curate the most stimulating opportunities for discovering how to create a positive future? How can we promote existing networks, bring together Fellows locally, and internationally at scale virtually?

Anton Howes provocation
Jamboard
THE SUMMIT THEMES

Descriptions and links to artifacts

**From Insight to Action**
— how the RSA can identify opportunities for action by harnessing the power of data and technology. How can the RSA listen, engage, and respond to opportunities for social impact powered by AI-driven insight tools and tech

**Learning Lab**
— how might the RSA facilitate learning within the RSA and beyond using digital tech & a blended approach? How can the RSA facilitate learning journeys via the greatest possible access to experts, peer learning and stimulating thought-fora?

**Makers Playground**
— how might we create an applied research programme which results in digital tools and products for changemakers? Imagine if we could commission programme-inspired product and service design experiments or Fellow ideas; move the RSA from just thinking into doing and action, from abstract to concrete

Phil Harvey provocation
Jamboard

Lord Jim Knight provocation
Jamboard

Mike Butcher provocation
Jamboard
DIGITAL SUMMIT INTENTIONS

- Begin a dialogue, spark ongoing creativity and collaboration
- Unlock the creativity and wisdom of RSA’s Fellowship to think like a system / act like an entrepreneur
- Create a new blueprint for Fellowship engagement and attraction
- Build a diverse network / ecosystem / community of support for the RSA’s digital transformation
- Feel good, have fun — this is a solution-focused creative event designed to spark joy — a safe space for setting imaginations free
THE CORE ORGANISING TEAM

Ann Longley, FRSA
Strategist

Peter Clitheroe, FRSA
Filmmaker

Yasmine Boudiaf
Creative Technologist

Chris Ward
RSA Head of Digital

WE JOINED FORCES TO HELP THE RSA ACHIEVE BETTER OUTCOMES — TOGETHER WE ARE GREATER THAN THE SUM OF OUR PARTS
*Visionaries, facilitators, benevolent provocateurs, entrepreneurs, academics, bloggers, Fellowship Councillors, and RSA staff — everyone had a role to play. Special thank you to The Projects Club, for donating a meeting room.
Thank You

For further information and to continue this conversation, please contact ALongleyCouncillor@rsa.org.uk