

JFB & Associates, LLC
Leadership and Organizational Development
3427 Lake Avenue South ** Duluth, MN 55802
720-839-4238 * jfbassociatesllc@gmail.com

Leadership Interviews Report
CONFIDENTIAL

Executive Summary

Background

JFB & Associates, LLC conducted leadership interviews in January 2019 as follow-up to the Representative Stakeholders Survey Report disseminated in December 2018. Eight (8) SRNT Board Members and three (3) additional Society leaders were interviewed. Of those, two-thirds have been Society members and in leadership positions for more than 15 years; the remaining third have been in Society membership for less than 10 years.

All interviews were conducted by phone and lasted no more than an hour. Interviewees were provided a list of the interview questions prior to their interview. All interviews are confidential. The following Leadership Interviews Summary Report has been produced for review by the SRNT Board; individual interview responses are not attributed to any one individual.

This Leadership Interviews Report along with the results of the Representative Stakeholder Survey Report will be used by the board in their discussions at their February meeting. These reports represent the first phase of work for SRNT 2025, which is to gather initial opinions, perceptions, and beliefs that set the baseline for decision-making on the selection of Work Advisory Groups and the framing of issues for their deliberation. The Leadership Interviews Report does not provide any in-depth analysis by the consultant, but instead provides a summation of opinions and views collected through the individual interviews.

Report Summary

There were ‘no surprises’ about themes emerging from the Representative Stakeholder Survey Report, according to the entire group of interviewees. There was general agreement that the divisiveness among researchers in the Field can be linked to concerns about changing research priorities, shifts in funding, and the continued influence of the Tobacco Industry.

The Tobacco Industry rose up as the main culprit for the divisiveness in the SRNT membership in particular, and the research field overall. While some thought SRNT and its members were becoming distracted by the controversy over the influence of the Tobacco Industry, the majority of those interviewed related concerns ranging from the participation of Tobacco Industry professionals (researchers and non-researchers) in SRNT, to calls for increased transparency in presentation of research funded by the Tobacco Industry.

The fact that the Tobacco Industry and its influence (real or perceived) dominated the conversations highlights the significance of this as a topic for further debate.

There was clear consensus that SRNT needs to take a strong leadership role in navigating the debate, taking into account perspectives from its members globally and establishing a definitive position for the Society vis-à-vis the Tobacco Industry.

In terms of the e-cigarette ‘debate’, the majority of comments focused on the Society’s role in providing a platform for ‘respectful’ debate and more deliberate monitoring of the Tobacco Industry’s participation in SRNT’s conferences, rather than on ownership of e-cigarettes or their role in ‘harm reduction’.

The majority of those interviewed agreed that SRNT is (and should remain) an ‘open’ society where all research is welcome based on stringent peer review, with extreme emphasis on transparency especially as relates to the Tobacco Industry. There was also a majority view that the Society must take a stronger stance in regulating how employees and consultants of the Tobacco Industry participate (or not) in SRNT.

There was discussion about value of membership, and the need for there to be clear categories for SRNT membership related to participation. In relation to this there were some references to a potential divide in the membership between basic science researchers (cellular, molecular, and genetic work) and those members doing behavioral, human, smoking cessation, policy, regulatory, or advocacy work. While some did think SRNT membership should be science-focused only, at least two-thirds of those interviewed were of the opinion that SRNT and its members should become more focused in the future on the translation of science for public health and advocacy purposes.

The discussions around SRNT as a ‘global’ society centered on Chapters and their value (current and potential) to SRNT, and how the growth of Chapters provides the best opportunity for SRNT to have a more global reach especially in helping to inform policy and clinical care globally through research. The concept (as well as the reality) of Chapters is widely supported.

When asked about the role of SRNT in creating or supporting Chapters, the majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that Chapters are best developed organically based on the network of leaders in specific regions that see the need and opportunity to develop a Chapter.

There was also a distinction made by several of those interviewed between SRNT as an ‘international’ society and as a ‘global’ society. There was consensus that SRNT is not a truly global Society in terms of membership or global influence, especially with LMICs. However, there was great interest expressed in SRNT University providing an opportunity to be a venue for enhanced dissemination and outreach, using technology.

There was general consensus that SRNT University is an excellent idea, although at least half of those interviewed said they were not very familiar with the plans for and purpose of SRNT University.

When asked to share their greatest concerns about the future of the Field, those interviewed identified four distinct topics:

- Continued Divisiveness in the Field

- Funding and Research Priorities
- Translation of Science
- SRNT's Role

When asked what would be the single most significant issue for SRNT to address over the next 10 years, respondents identified three issues:

- Advocacy and Public Health
- Influence Research Priorities and Funding
- The Society, its Role and Value

When asked their opinion on the greatest opportunity for the Field that SRNT could facilitate, consensus was for SRNT to be a leading voice for research, and the primary convener for dissemination of the science. At the same time, there was also a majority of comments about the impact of changing research priorities on funding, and a desire for SRNT to consider taking a stronger role in advocacy as a society.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Recommendation 1: Establish Three Work Advisory Groups

1. SRNT Structure & Participation:
 - a. Membership (Composition, Diversity, Expectations. Who sits at the table and what are the rules? Who is our audience?)
 - b. Annual Conference (Who is our audience?)
 - c. SRNT Branches (SRNT University, Networks, Journal)
2. SRNT Purpose & Role
 - a. Mission, Purpose (Science, Advocacy, Public Health. Who is our audience? What's our brand?)
 - b. Leading the Field (Positions and Policies)
 - c. Developing the Next Generation of Researchers
3. SRNT Global Presence
 - a. Defining 'Global' (Global vs. International. Who is our audience?)
 - b. Chapters (Policies, Expectations. Who is our audience?)
 - c. SRNT's Responsibility For Engaging LMICs (Capacity versus Appetite)

Recommendation 2: Authorize a Member Survey in 2019 to be conducted after the first round of Work Advisory Group meetings in the Spring of 2019 to test initial assumptions and inform deliberations.

Recommendation 3: Conduct a 15-day 'Member Comment Period' in October 2019 to react to initial conclusions of the Work Advisory Groups and inform the Board's deliberations and decision-making.

Summation by Question

Question 1: What was your reaction to the Key Stakeholders Survey Report?

Summation

There were four main areas commented on by those interviewed:

No Surprises. The majority of those interviewed agreed that the survey responses were a good reflection of what is seen in the field, and hit on critical issues. There was diversity of views and the questions highlighted have been in the background, so there is appreciation for the Society addressing these inflection points.

Tobacco Industry Influence. The Tobacco Industry, its relationship to the field, its influence on funding and research, and the long term controversy about transparency around funding for research from the Tobacco Industry were most mentioned by those interviewed. In conjunction, there were comments about the rise of the e-cigarette industry and its contribution to the divisiveness among researchers globally related to Tobacco Industry participation and influence. Some noted that thematically the ‘relationship to the Tobacco Industry’ dominated survey responses, and wondered if or how the emphasis can be steered to arguing for the science (over emotion), and moving away from the Tobacco Industry influence as a ‘main issue’ as there are many other important issues to address. It was also noted that some researchers (primarily in the U.S.) are vocally passionate about the Tobacco Industry being an industry that makes money killing people and believe it is a slippery slope taking research money from the Tobacco Industry. These sentiments seem to underscore the controversy around the Tobacco Industry’s influence as well as its participation at any level with SRNT.

International Perspective. About a third of those interviewed noted that the comments in the Survey Report were very much U.S. focused and did not necessarily represent non-U.S. countries where there is a diversity of views. Having noted this focus, those interviewed acknowledged that 80% of the membership is from the U.S., and the lion’s share of funding worldwide is generated in the U.S. thus the magnitude of research.

The Future for New Researchers. Approximately a third of those interviewed said they noted comments in the Survey Report recommending SRNT consider influencing or focusing on the development of future researchers and research leaders, specifically how these researchers would be recruited to and included in SRNT membership, and what the field may look like in ten years’ time.

Question 2: Which of the emerging themes in Section 1 (Future of the Field) do you believe will (or can) most impact the future of research on nicotine and tobacco? Why?

- a. Divisiveness in the Field***
- b. Impact of the Tobacco Industry Influence on Research***
- c. Shifting Research Priorities***

- d. Perceived Decline in Research Funding—SRNT does not really have a role here to inform funders; funders can drive focus of research.*
- e. SRNT Leadership Role*

Summation

The responses to this question were interesting in that everyone initially agreed all the issues are linked, with none at the top of the pyramid. However, with more dialogue, four main discussion threads arose across all interviewed, specifically:

- Provenance and transparency of research funding (i.e., funding from the Tobacco Industry)
- Influence of the Tobacco Industry on research priorities
- Participation of the Tobacco Industry in any SRNT conferences, events
- The future of research funding overall

The Tobacco Industry rose up as the main culprit for the divisiveness in the SRNT membership in particular, and the research field overall. A third of those interviewed thought SRNT and its members were becoming distracted by the controversy over the influence of the Tobacco Industry, saying this risked putting less emphasis on the core business of SRNT which is (in their opinion) to lead the future of the research field overall. However, the fact that the Tobacco Industry and its influence (real or perceived) dominated the conversations highlights the significance of this as a topic for further debate.

Following is a compilation of comments that support these statements:

- Funding is really driving the divisiveness, which is a division of views whether or not to take TI funding.
- I have concern about censorship; i.e., allowing or disallowing certain speakers based on funding sources.
- We must have clear transparency and declaration of interest as there are different levels of interest beyond funding like moral and regional.
- We shouldn't discount research simply because of the funding resource; some of that research has a higher level of scrutiny because of the funding source.
- Divisiveness in the field is the greatest threat; notably the advent of breakaway conferences demonstrating that SRNT is not meeting the needs of some members.
- Divisiveness on TI funding is a long term issue that has been heightened because of e-cigarettes.
- The base of the division in the field is TI funding of the research, researchers, their presence at the SRNT conference, and their participation.
- SRNT is in an uncomfortable position because certain researchers who have been SRNT founders and leaders are now taking TI funds, and there may be a personal discomfort to exclude them. This is a dilemma.
- There is a perception among some members that those researchers funded by TI are not being honest about who they are, who they are funded by, and 'don't tell the truth'.
- A major issue for me is disclosure at the conference; we often don't know who are NOT with SRNT because we allow TI.

- What are the longer term implications of taking funding from the TI? How might this impact the credibility of research short- and long-term?
- Shifting research priorities is at the center of the division, and what has sparked the controversy has not really changed. Some are veterans of the ‘tobacco wars’; anyone in this group is virulently anti-tobacco and rears up when there seems to be acceptance.
- The impact of the TI on research is strongly linked to the changing landscape of tobacco products and changing the research priorities. FDA is funding the vast majority of research in US, which has changed to regulatory away from treatment specifically. This creates divide between American researchers and those from other countries because the FDA has an outsize influence on the field.

An analysis of these comments points to the five themes being connected back to concerns about the influence of the Tobacco Industry on:

- Research Funding (and thus Research Findings)
- Research Priorities
- Credibility of the Research

The influence of the Tobacco Industry appears to be at the base of the divisiveness within the field, though notably mostly in the United States where there is the perception that no clear line is drawn about Tobacco Industry participation and research funding.

The other focal point of responses was what SRNT should do about the divisiveness, and specifically how the Society should address all the concerns about the TI and its role, influence, and participation.

There was clear consensus that SRNT needs to take a true leadership role in sorting all this out, taking into account perspectives from its members globally and establishing a definitive position for the Society vis-à-vis the Tobacco Industry. In short, the majority of those interviewed agreed that SRNT must increase expectations for disclosures about the provenance of research funding, ensure affiliations are prominently displayed, and that IF researchers funded by the Tobacco Industry participate, there must be full transparency about their affiliations and funding. Other comments and suggestions:

- SRNT should represent as a convener. The Society is not there to solve the controversies, but to provide venues for discussions to take place. The Society must be an honest broker and allow all voices to be heard, with the caveat that it must also make sure there are no hidden agendas beneath what is presented.
- Continue to be open to all research being presented, and to be transparent as possible so folks can make their own decisions. Transparency on where funding is coming from is critical for credibility.
- Be open to all science, focusing more on the scientific side of SRNT.

- Question 3:** There appear to be select controversies in the Field right now, specifically,
- a. Whether e-cigarettes represent harm reduction or not, and how to navigate the division among researchers on this issue;
 - b. The fact of ownership of e-cigarette manufacturers by the Tobacco Industry and what that means (or might mean) for research;
 - c. The acceptance of funding for research from the Tobacco Industry that may or may not exclude researchers from presenting at SRNT conferences.
- What should SRNT's role be in either resolving or navigating these seemingly divisive issues among its members?**

Summation

There were three distinct discussion threads in this section. Of the three, the majority of comments focused more on the Society's role in providing a platform for 'respectful' debate and more deliberate monitoring of the Tobacco Industry's participation in SRNT's conferences, and less on ownership of e-cigarettes or their role in 'harm reduction'. Many of the comments in this section mirror those in Section 4, which questioned the 'openness' of the Society in relation to researchers and participation by the Tobacco Industry in the Society.

Discussion Thread: SRNT's role

SRNT's role in navigating the controversy around e-cigarettes and the Tobacco Industry (i.e., ownership) was a common discussion point. Most agreed that SRNT's best role is to provide a platform to discuss the issues in a dispassionate way, and to be very up front about the Society's role in moderating the debate. SRNT should not shy away from the conversation for fear of offending certain members; instead SRNT needs to encourage discussion about the science. A challenge noted was how SRNT can moderate the conversation without being perceived as taking sides or as giving endorsement to one opinion or another. There was general agreement that SRNT's overriding responsibility is to provide a place for respectful debate and open dialogue and to be the neutral ground for hard discussion that is collegial and factual. If SRNT goes too far in taking one view or another it could splinter the membership.

Also cited is the need for transparency. SRNT needs to do a better job of ensuring there is full disclosure and address concerns about poster placement (i.e., that posters from academia were sandwiched in between TI funded posters). There can be better clarity or separation, perhaps holding different sessions or even color coding to distinguish between industry, government, and academia. It was perceived by several that those presenting Tobacco Industry funded research sometimes 'forget' to clarify they are from industry.

Discussion Thread: E-Cigarettes

An interesting discussion focused on the concern about e-cigarettes and the diverse perspectives globally about e-cigarettes and their role (or not) in harm reduction.

There was agreement on the 'split' of perception between the US and the UK about e-cigarettes, and some sense that the debate may be inhibiting the desire for newer researchers to investigate e-cigarettes because of the perceived divisiveness of the debate.

Ownership appears to be the complicating issue – there is not a clear understanding on the long-term impact of e-cigarettes, so the attitude in the US is to be hesitant in promoting or embracing e-cigarettes as harm reduction. The other factor mentioned was the level of emotional angst about researchers leaving the field to work for the Tobacco Industry and/or e-cigarette companies. There needs to be more information and education to better understand the issues around e-cigarettes, and SRNT could do more to provide a public forum for debate to help inform the Field. It is a rapidly changing landscape as well, especially as the Tobacco Industry buys e-cigarette companies. There is division also because of the messaging coming from different parts of the world: some say “e-cigarettes are a harm reduction strategy”; others say they are looking for “no harm”, and e-cigarettes are harmful. SRNT has an opportunity to broker respectful debate.

Discussion Thread: Tobacco Industry Participation in SRNT

The third line of discussion focused on participation by the Tobacco Industry in SRNT, especially at conferences. This ranged from presentation on research funded by the Tobacco Industry, to acceptance of researchers taking Tobacco Industry funding, to the participation (or not) of Tobacco Industry employees at SRNT events and on the listserv.

The majority of those interviewed agreed there is conflict with participation of the Tobacco Industry at SRNT meetings. While they agreed that participation of researchers funded by the Tobacco Industry is primarily acceptable, the greater concern is industry influencing the research and conference agenda and ensuing discussions among researchers. The respondents perceived hidden agendas by both researchers funded by the TI and by TI employees and consultants who are allowed to participate in networking sessions and discussions at the conferences and on the listserv.

There was acknowledgement that all the varying opinions put the Society in the difficult position of navigating the desire for ‘openness’ in allowing for all research to be presented, while at the same time monitoring and ensuring transparency about the provenance of research funding. Some non-US members also noted that, while the majority of membership is US based, it would benefit the Society to more readily consider views from other parts of the world especially around e-cigarettes and the participation of the Tobacco Industry.

About a third of those interviewed stated personal positions that they would never take funding from the Tobacco Industry, but there are different situations, and that it’s not a new thing for researchers to be funded by the Tobacco Industry. The real issue is about how that research is presented (maybe allow only posters and not full presentations or keynote addresses) and the necessity that presenters be very transparent about the funding sources.

Question 4: While 80% of the focus group survey respondents said SRNT should remain an open society (i.e., accepting research and researchers funded by the Tobacco Industry), at the same time there was a clear undertone of not wanting Tobacco Industry or e-cigarette ‘professionals’ (non-researchers) to be allowed membership and, according to about 40% of respondents, not be allowed to participate in any SRNT activities. How can SRNT best navigate this dilemma?

Summation

The primary discussion in this section centered around better defining membership (who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’), value for membership, and expectations of membership.

The overriding theme (mirrored in Question 3) is to be ‘open’ to research but to absolutely ensure transparency where Tobacco Industry funding is concerned. Additionally, the majority (80%) of those interviewed were very clear that the Society must take a stronger stance in regulating how employees and consultants of the Tobacco Industry participate (or not) in the SRNT annual conference and on the listsev. This group was exceedingly clear in their emphasis on not allowing Tobacco Industry employees to hijack group discussions, argue about scientific presentations, or misrepresent who they are (and who they represent) at SRNT events. There were some discussions about value of membership and the need for there to be clear categories for SRNT membership related to participation. Half of those interviewed expressed concerns about who gets in the door at conferences and membership meetings; the concern being that non-members are attending because ‘no one checks membership at the door’.

Additionally, if the expectation is for members to serve on the various Network boards (which is a great member service and leadership experience), those interviewed said they want to make sure only members are participating and that the direction or discussions of the Networks are not being influenced by representatives from for-profit industries (i.e., the Tobacco Industry) by virtue of their ‘hidden’ participation.

All those interviewed agreed that SRNT is (and should remain) an ‘open’ society where all research is welcome based on stringent peer review, with extreme emphasis on transparency. However, there was not consensus on whether those presenting TI-funded research should be members. There were clearly stated concerns that there is not enough done by the Society to ensure disclosures about affiliations from TI-funded researchers or TI non-research professionals (i.e., marketers).

There was also concern expressed by several of those interviewed that Tobacco Industry-funded research presented at meetings could be perceived as SRNT endorsing that science because of lack of transparency or a clear position by SRNT. SRNT needs to take care about this perception, and this should be addressed by the Board with a clear position taken. Is it possible for SRNT to have TI-funded research presented in a way that is transparent and clear that SRNT is not endorsing that research?

At least a third of those interviewed expressed concern about non-research professionals (marketers and consultants) from the Tobacco Industry having access to the listserv, and creating controversies and ‘heated arguments’ as a result. They feel strongly that the listserv should be for SRNT members only, and membership should not include non-research professionals from the Tobacco Industry (i.e., marketing and public relations employees).

Following are comments that underscore the variety of specific viewpoints:

- Ensure there is clarity about Industry-funded research (declaration of interest should be clear and up front).
- Do not allow industry professionals to become SRNT members, but allow them to present work at scientific events based on acceptance through peer review.
- Have some sessions not open to Industry-funded professionals (either closed sessions or sessions clearly demarcated for Industry-funded professionals).
- Do not allow participation by e-cigarette funded professionals if the e-cigarette company is owned by the Tobacco Industry; consider allowing it if they are not.
- Do not allow Tobacco Industry marketing/public relation professionals (non-researchers) to participate in small group discussions held for researchers. Ensure these sessions are researcher-to-researcher with shared language and focus on the science.
- SRNT’s role is to ‘generate and disseminate knowledge’, not to censor. Allow Tobacco Industry-funded research that passes peer review to be presented, but do so in special poster sessions (allowing for transparency on funding), and/or a special Journal issue.
- SRNT take a position that clearly states the Society is not censoring membership or science, but also is not endorsing any one position.

There was discussion about value of membership, and the need for there to be clear categories for SRNT membership related to participation. In relation to this, there were some references to a potential divide in the membership between basic science researchers (cellular, molecular, and genetic work) and those members doing behavioral, human, smoking cessation, policy, regulatory, or advocacy work. While some did think SRNT membership should be science-focused only, at least two-thirds of those interviewed were of the opinion that SRNT and its members should become more focused in the future on the translation of science for public health and advocacy purposes.

Ultimately, the definition of SRNT membership came into question, specifically who is allowed to be a fully-fledged member and who is not, and what the diversity of membership is. Should there be more requirements or standards for membership than there are now? What about the impact on SRNT leadership?

There was a perception articulated by one of the interviewees that “it is concerning that there are sometimes major roles at the SRNT conference where it appears the Tobacco Industry position is being pushed, which impacts the conduct of the meeting.” This speaks to the challenge of SRNT being a convener but then also being suspect about possibly ‘endorsing’ the TI by convening all sides. The resulting questions: Who is at the table with what influence, and how does that impact the future of SRNT membership? What does it mean to be a member? What are rights and privileges of SRNT membership? What is the value and purpose of SRNT to all members, and what does that mean for access to at every level of SRNT?

This section clarified the need for a Working Group specific to SRNT Membership.

Question 5: There was enthusiasm among respondents for SRNT to have a more global reach (and in some cases, influence). Members and researchers, particularly those in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), seem to perceive SRNT as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with unlimited financial support for travel and other conference support. However, SRNT is a membership society that relies on dues and conference income for funding of its infrastructure and activities. SRNT also has a first obligation is to its members as well as a dissemination mission. Given SRNT's financial and structural limitations as well as its current membership demographic, what do you think is the best way for SRNT to address the issue of globalization of SRNT's membership? Is SRNT meant to be a truly global organization, and if so, how do we effectively meet the many needs of researchers in lower-income regions?

Summation

While the majority of discussion resulting from this question centered on Chapters and their value (current and potential) to SRNT, there was also a distinction was made by several of those interviewed between SRNT as an 'international' society, and as a 'global' society.

About a third expressed the opinion that SRNT is adequately 'international' from a standpoint of representation in its leadership, both through the Board and the Networks. The same respondents did not perceive SRNT as a 'global' society, which would mean a significant diversity of membership from multiple countries around the globe; this latter opinion was shared by the majority of those interviewed.

The discussion of Chapters focused primarily on how the growth of Chapters provides the best opportunity for SRNT to have a more global reach especially in helping to inform policy and clinical care globally through research. The concept (as well as the reality) of Chapters is widely supported.

When asked about the role of SRNT in creating or supporting Chapters, the majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that Chapters are best developed organically based on the network of leaders in specific regions that see the need and opportunity to develop a Chapter. Most referenced the recent establishment of the Oceania Chapter, which developed based on the interest and hard work of those in the region. SRNT Europe, which has been in existence for at least 10 years, also grew from grassroots efforts. Chapters can foster local networking, mentoring, and build representation in SRNT.

Most agreed that SRNT should be responsive to interest from those in a region wanting to start a Chapter, but also acknowledged that SRNT has no policy about its role in forming and/or supporting Chapters. It would be useful to have a set of policies and guidelines to maintain scientific rigor and ethical reporting, and to encourage inclusiveness. These same could also set

the standard and expectations for Chapters. This would be a primary role for SRNT, to ensure Chapters use the same or similar guidelines.

There was also agreement that, while SRNT Europe and now Oceania will have their own identities and agendas specific to their regions, they are still under the umbrella of SRNT as the overarching organization. The Chapters link back to SRNT through representation on the SRNT Board, and typically will defer to the 'international' SRNT board on issues of policy. Chapters do not want to compete with SRNT, and in fact see great benefit in working together towards a more global view.

When asked about Chapter development for Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), most of those interviewed thought it might be difficult for Chapters to develop organically because of smaller groups of scientists and lack of resources. At the same time, they also did not believe it feasible for SRNT to lead establishment of Chapters in LMICs for these same reasons.

Some believe that SRNT could consider a more global role by encouraging researchers in High-Income Countries (HIC)s to collaborate more with those in LMICs. Most cited SRNT University as the greatest opportunity to disseminate information and provide an online network for researchers across the globe, especially in LMICs. Some also wondered about the feasibility of livestreaming conferences or sessions, and how SRNT University might respond to needs through technology.

Questions raised focused primarily on SRNT's appetite and capacity to build a more global society. Is it or should it be a priority for SRNT based on its mission? Does being a more global society also mean pursuing more policy-oriented activities? Can SRNT credibly be inclusive of researchers from LMICs, based on significantly different cultural and political realities? Is there the capacity and/or appetite (desire) to build membership from LMICs?

Overall there was consensus on supporting the Chapters and their organic growth with SRNT support. SRNT should have a policy about Chapters, especially around standards for establishing a Chapter, expectations for coordinating with SRNT, and what support SRNT would provide. There was consensus that SRNT is not a truly global Society in terms of membership or global influence, especially with LMICs. However, there was great interest expressed in SRNT University providing an opportunity to be a venue for enhanced dissemination and outreach, using technology.

Most agreed that looking more closely at the question of SRNT as a 'global' society and the role of Chapters should be included in a Work Advisory Group.

Question 6: How can SRNT University address future needs of the Field in a meaningful way? What about addressing future needs of SRNT members?

Summation

There was general consensus that SRNT University is an excellent idea, although at least half of those interviewed said they were not very familiar with the plans for and purpose of SRNT University.

There is a perception that SRNT-U will provide access to tobacco science information and training for tobacco researchers and potentially consumers, especially those in the public health field, for use in advocacy. There is also a perception that SRNT-U can provide increased access to information for researchers and public health officials in LMICs, though they might need to address the technology barriers for some.

The vision for SRNT-U as understood by those interviewed is to be a conduit for knowledge and networking that will help scientists and users in other countries. As a global platform, SRNT-U can be the outlet for disseminating information for all researchers and be a powerful way to share information on treatment programs around the world. It can also be a significant networking resource for researchers in LMICs.

Some noted that SRNT-U is a big investment of time and resources for SRNT and wondered if it will ultimately be worth that investment. Understanding and managing expectations, and monitoring goals and outcomes will be important for ongoing support from the membership as a whole.

Most also said it will be important to know who will comprise the actual constituency of SRNT-U, and what the plans are for promotion. There were also questions about the financial structure of SRNT-U, and a perception that SRNT will be ‘giving it away’ for free to anyone who wishes to access SRNT-U. There were some concerns that membership would not be required in order to participate in SRNT-U, nor was any fee structure apparent for certifications or access to webinars or other information.

Overall there was good enthusiasm for SRNT-U, though not significant direct knowledge about the structure, use, and constituency for SRNT-U.

Question 7: What is your greatest concern about the future of the Field?

Summation

Four distinct areas of concern were identified by respondents.

Continued divisiveness in the Field

- We are seeing more ‘sides’ being taken instead of finding the middle ground to move forward. Extreme voices tend to be heard over the ones in the middle; this limits our understanding and knowledge of really sound research.
- Ongoing disagreements on how we agree on or navigate different opinions. Rhetoric has become unsettling; we could harm ourselves in the community by not being able to have constructive conversation.

- Tensions around how to regard the Tobacco Industry; this has blown up at past meetings and we are seeing this again with e-cigarette research. We give the impression of being collegial, but we shy away from having difficult conversations.
- Divisions among researchers – attacking each other and our research is distracting from our mission.
- Impact of Tobacco Industry-funded research on our field. There used to be TI research (profit motivated) and “legitimate” research and the line is being blurred. There are researchers who consult but are not employees of TI, so information and messaging all gets mixed in.

Funding and Research Priorities

- Funding/money going to research is harder to come by.
- The type of research getting funded is concerning; I don’t think it is as well aligned with real world needs (like treatment development; need more practical research for use).
- As research priorities or issues change, could change the provenance of funding from different sources. This should be a source of concern for the research community.
- Ongoing credibility issue related to where funding comes from.
- New products come along so quickly it’s difficult to keep up. For example, new non-combustibles products are being introduced to the market so quickly, we are trying to understand how or whether they fit into the core theories. There is so much new knowledge all the time, that even with a huge public health push to understand what is safe and what is not we still need a lot of fundamental science to inform the push.
- Young people won’t want to come into research. What’s the landscape going to look like? Research priorities are moving very fast with tobacco, hard to predict. And many researchers are retiring; who comes behind and can they get funding?

Translation of Science

- The future will be okay if it makes itself relevant, so translation of science to people becomes important for the research to be supported.
- It is very important for scientists to devote themselves to the translation for the benefit of the public and LMICs.
- A lot of the science we need to be engaged in is implementation science rather than discovery. We can do modeling to show if we could increase the way people implement the evidence-based science on how to stop smoking; this would have a bigger impact.
- Science and translation of science around the world is much more important than focus on e-cigarettes. We should focus on real behavioral science and not get side tracked.
- We are not doing enough to translate what we are learning from research to implementing it in the world.

SRNT’s Role

- Show leadership. Make public statements about membership and mission. Engineer opportunities for appropriately conducted debate at meetings and through commentary in the Journal. Keep it at a constructive level.
- Develop and publicize its leadership role and strategy to tackle issues head on.
- Have the moral courage to call out people who act badly or use divisive rhetoric.

- SRNT has a leadership opportunity in light of changing funding sources to consider and debate about where sources of funding could come from, and to shape and/or influence.
- Facilitate platforms for open debate with full declaration of interest and don't censor but take research on its merit.
- SRNT needs to be clear about its position as the convener.
- The Society must allow open and balanced discussion across its entire membership to avoid becoming even more US-focused and not international.

Question 8: In your opinion, what is the single most significant issue for SRNT to address over the next 10 years?

Summation

Responses fell into three categories: Advocacy and Public Health, Influencing of Research Priorities and Funding, The Society: Its Role and Value

Advocacy and Public Health

- Reduce health inequities worldwide. Use science to help those least advantaged.
- Encourage good science at all levels, from basic to applied and policy. (Some we already do, but this should be a mission focus for SRNT over the next 10 years)
- Do more in terms of public engagement and dissemination of robust research findings. Provide the stamp of approval on research findings that the public can have confidence in.
- Ramp up the advocacy role; take stances on research findings and disseminate to the public.
- Advocacy. SRNT has to reach policy makers; these folks need to use the research and also have control over the funds.
- SRNT should get away from thinking about advocacy being a 'light' thing to do.
- Advocacy will make the organization and the research accessible to the people (especially to researchers in LMICs)

Influence Research Priorities and Funding

- Play a larger role in driving the research priorities. Members either think or expect that SRNT is already an advocate for this than is done – and that is a frustration from the members.
- Need to figure out how to address and study ALL tobacco and nicotine research.
- Have a role lobbying for research funding in particular areas.
- Take a role in identifying sources of funding, and shaping those sources.
- Support the continuation of tobacco research including the question of e-cigarettes and funding.
- Play a larger role in advocating for public health research that inform funding priorities and policies. Smoking remains #1 preventable cause of illness and death, and is not getting the attention for research. SRNT find a way to expand and include in its mission a greater role to keep the spotlight on this need.
- Look at the impact of marijuana issue as a scope of research interest.

The Society, its Role and Value

- Maintain events for the membership and for the Field. Make sure the meeting is being responsive to groundbreaking topics. Bring in new innovations from other societies; encourage innovation.
- Determine the Society's position on members who get funding from private foundations and sources from the TI.
- Ensure that the Society does not become too obsessed about e-cigarette products and research; this is one of many things happening.
- Determine if harm reduction as a topic should be its own conference, or one day at the existing conference. We need more diversity around the issues at hand and what is cutting edge.
- Continue to be an honest broker for its members, and to be a resource for its members so they enjoy being engaged. Useful, constructive; an organization that promotes really good science, and translation of science to useful products and outcomes.
- Develop researchers and their capacity to stay focused on their science by providing the place for dissemination and knowledge. Keep an eye on the most important things in the Field.
- Continue to bring scientists together to solve big problems at the annual meeting, and through topical Networks.
- Dissemination is key to SRNT's public face; should not go beyond the science as advocates, but focus on providing the information.

Question 9: What is the greatest opportunity for the Field that SRNT could facilitate?

Summation

Convening, dissemination, and leadership of the field were the common themes in responses from those interviewed.

- To be a greater voice in disseminating findings.
- To be the leading voice in the tobacco endgame especially in HICs; maybe see the end of combustible tobacco use. SRNT could be at the forefront of that.
- SRNT could facilitate the human capital of good researchers who can navigate the policy as well as researcher fields.
- Equip the next generation of researchers with the skills to navigate communication about their science for research funding, and to facilitate ongoing communication between researchers globally.
- SRNT is distinctive as a scientific society with a broad scientific constituency; we need to capitalize on this to be truly international.
- SRNT should continue to be the place where people from around the world can present their funded research.
- Continue convening for and dissemination of the science, but increase its role in the translation of science to the public and to researchers in the LMICs.

- To improve our science with development of new tools to think about our science. SRNT could be at the forefront to take research on nicotine and tobacco from a cottage industry to creating a real web of knowledge and understanding in the area.

Question 10: An important outcome from the February Board discussion will be the identification of Work Advisory Groups to deliberate on specific topics identified by the Board as critical to SRNT's future and the SRNT 2025 project. Some topics have been suggested based on the themes arising from the initial Focus Group Survey work, as follows:

- a. "Global" (including LMICs and Chapter support);
- b. "Future of the Field of Research on Nicotine and Tobacco" (how SRNT will take a leadership role in addressing changes in research based on the rapid growth of emerging nicotine delivery technologies, the impact of tobacco industry funding through the Smoke Free World Foundation, and SRNT's future relevance as an open research society);
- c. "SRNT Structure and Funding" (how SRNT will position itself to move forward by addressing its financial base as an association. This may include the idea of becoming fee-based rather than dues-based);
- d. "SRNT-U" (Educational priorities, audiences, and desired impact).

In your opinion, are these valid topics? What other topics do you believe should be addressed by Work Advisory Groups as part of the SRNT 2025 process?

Summation

There was general agreement on the topics presented, with suggestions about more specific focal points for further deliberation within each of the larger topics.

Future of the Field of Research

- Emerging nicotine products/harm reduction
- Funding issue (SFWF is just one example)
- Changing landscape, products, how to navigate
- What's the impact of the Industry funding; how does SRNT make policy positions about TI-funded research.
- Cannabis and its impact

SRNT Structure and Purpose

- SRNT Purpose/public health and public: Advocacy/Lobbying/Engagement
- SRNT membership (composition, diversity, expectations, value)
- Future of tobacco researchers, leaders, young and new investigators.
- Communicate that SRNT is going through this process and if the mission/value changes then this process will provide the WHY and RATIONALE. Make sure members really understand what SRNT is doing.

Global

- Definition of “Global”
- Chapters
- LMICs
- Global vs. International

Question 11: What other comments or thoughts would you like to share at this time?

- SRNT is an amazing organization; friendly and collegial at all levels. Wonderful exchanges of ideas; very functional and positive society that has a bright future.
- Work we are doing now is not because we are floundering, but to get out in front of the Field and SRNT’s future.
- What about work groups, will Board members be assigned or included? (Provided the overview of next steps)
- Hard to keep up with all the changes in the industry; researchers are playing catch up to all these changes and the impact on public health.
- Change is to think about how we fund research and respond to the many changes; other fields grapple with these same issues.
- Very helpful joining SRNT as part of my development as a trainee and researcher.
- Great to see spotlight on women in the field; these are so valuable and helpful. SRNT does this well.
- Much isn’t new, but great that it’s being addressed.
- Journal is in good health; how does it fit in this process?
- Make sure that SRNT remains focused on trainees and early career researchers. It’s important to develop careers of our junior scientists...put this into a work group!
- SRNT to retain its focus on science; not get sidetracked. KEEP the science as the primary mission and consider what might be in addition without detracting from the science.
- Nothing about the LMICs in the survey report; how can we get better information and insights, connection to the LMICs. Should be looking at LMICs and seeing what they are doing because it’s a lot!
- Think very highly of SRNT, but also see the cracks.
- Issues around membership; how to retain members, get new members, give value to members, and the conference itself. How to improve to make better. Could be part of Structure and Funding Work Group.
- Hope the Board doesn’t get consumed about the TI, don’t want to be defined by this focus. Want to focus on other topics, not just about the TI. More we talk about it, the more divisive it will become.
- Regarding the conference specifically: often a mismatch between the title of presentations and the presentations themselves, and what is actually reported. Reason? There is not a structured enough approach for submission of abstracts; need a more structured approach for submitters and reviewers to ensure more clarity around what will be discussed.
- Executive leadership
 - Amazing amount of volunteer participation; a real asset.
 - Bruce, Rees Group, do a great job.
 - Leadership of SRNT is awesome; Board is great, Bruce amazing, Mona awesome.

JFB & Associates LLC

2-7-19

Confidential

- Rees Group has been a huge help to SRNT; Bruce's continuity with SRNT has been amazing. He is conscientious, energized, humorous, respectful.