



SRNT

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Executive Summary of the Year-long SRNT Core Organizational Values Process, Facilitated Discussions, and Listening Sessions

In August of 2023, the SRNT Board of Directors began talking about the future of SRNT, about changes taking place in the field of nicotine and tobacco research that are impacting the Society.

Our founding generation is near or past retirement age—almost half of SRNT’s Presidents are retired—and a new generation of researchers is joining the field. As generations change, the field changes. And as the industry making products that are the focus of our research evolves with increasing speed, the very environment in which we operate changes with increasing speed.

Differing reasons for choosing this field of research; evolving views on subjects both old and new; different disciplines working with communities faced with new problems; evolving ideas about how we use our research and what we do with findings once an abstract is presented or a paper published; differing viewpoints on industry research and, more recently, how to define the commercial tobacco industry¹, are all part of a natural evolution spanning decades as well as generations, the field as well as the Society.

And with change comes challenge.

Differences of opinion in the field have been reflected in SRNT since its founding. As a result of—or, perhaps, simply amplified by—30 years of evolution, the Society has in recent years witnessed an increase in divisiveness. Disagreements that once were respectful are now, at times, quite acrimonious, be they through interactions with presenters at the Annual Meeting, via listservs, or in other communications. It has been noted more than once that what once was a collegial group in a welcoming atmosphere has increasingly become less so, with segmented groups and a conference where *positions* are *argued* as well as *science* being *discussed*, another change in the field finding its way

¹ Definition of the “commercial tobacco industry” for the Purpose of SRNT Policies

The commercial tobacco industry is defined as any manufacturer, marketer, distributor, or importer of a commercial tobacco product, and any partially or wholly owned subsidiary. Also included are marketing/PR firms; legal firms; commercial tobacco industry-sponsored advocacy groups; and private foundations that have received or continue to receive funding from a commercial tobacco manufacturer. The definition does not extend to manufacturers of nicotine products that do not contain tobacco leaf, unless the nicotine product manufacturer is a wholly or partially owned subsidiary of a commercial tobacco product manufacturer. In those cases, all policies related to the commercial tobacco industry apply.

into SRNT. The fact that changes in the field are amplified within our Society is not surprising; after all, SRNT is a microcosm of the field with all the diversity of discipline, geography, opinions, beliefs, and positions every bit as present within SRNT as they are in the broader research community.

It was against this backdrop that the Board began looking at the future of the Society, specifically how SRNT, an international, transdisciplinary scientific society, can best carry out its mission, present the latest, cutting-edge research at the Annual Meeting and publish the best scientific papers in our Journal. It was necessary to find common ground.

During this period of strategic thinking the Board also began discussing the Racial Equity Task Force's (RETF) recommendation to ban commercial tobacco industry-funded research based on the industry's decades-long, well documented history of racism. After months of discussion, the Board accepted the RETF recommendation, and the new policy was announced shortly after the 2024 Annual Meeting in Edinburgh.

Heading into the 2024 Annual Meeting the Board began work with an outside consultant to develop Core Organizational Values, intended to help the Board navigate difficult or divisive issues in the future. While values-based decisions were certainly not new to the SRNT Board, codifying Core Organizational Values was necessary, as was member feedback on the work undertaken by the Board.

During this process, two commentaries addressing the commercial tobacco industry's engagement with SRNT were published in *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. Regarding industry engagement, SRNT has implemented successive and increasingly restrictive bans on the commercial tobacco industry over the last 15 years:

- In 2010 commercial tobacco industry employees were banned from membership in the Society and participation in all membership activities, including our topical Networks.
- By 2017 commercial tobacco industry employees were banned from reviewing papers for the Journal and abstracts for the conference.
- In 2021 commercial tobacco industry employees were banned from attending the SRNT conference.
- In May of 2024 commercial tobacco industry-funded research was banned from both the conference and Journal.

Each Board policy was enacted in response to a specific concern, problem, or historical practice on industry's part.

Following publication of the commentaries, the Board's plans for codifying Core Organizational Values with membership input were expanded to include Facilitated Board Discussions with commentary authors and with trainees and early career researchers. In addition, two open Listening Sessions were held, during which members were invited to share with the Board their thoughts, opinions, and/or concerns on any topic. At the request of the Indigenous Circle, the Board held an additional listening session in early February of this year for Circle members. Not surprisingly, the Board heard divergent opinions on complex issues across all of these events.

Finally, an important goal of the Board's efforts to codify Core Organizational Values was to bring members together, to identify and document what we share in common even as divisions in the field have widened. We need to bring SRNT to a place where disagreements can be respectfully

discussed. We all need to be reminded that, as a community of researchers working across disciplines and geographic regions, we have more in common than not; the broad support of proposed Core Organizational Values provided confirmation. Furthermore, as part of the member survey conducted in September, we asked *why* members chose this field of research. Again, we found much in common. Ultimately, SRNT members work in nicotine and tobacco research to advance science, to improve health, and to save lives.

Important: The work reflected in this document was largely conducted and concluded prior to the release of the new Administration's Executive Orders in late January 2025 that have had such a dramatic impact on US researchers. This is important to note because those Executive Orders, as well as the ones that have been release since and continue to be released, have put a sharp focus on the values that SRNT stands for, including but not limited to, science itself, scientific integrity, inclusion, health equity, etc. As the Board takes up the next phase of this work, it will do so in a different context and with different internal and external pressures compared to when discussions and this work began. While the contextual pressures are different, the need for SRNT members to come together as a unified scientific society to live our shared values—despite our differences—and make principled decisions about our future as a scientific membership society has never been more critical.