

News from the Forwards Taskforce

by Heather Turner

Forwards is an R Foundation taskforce working to widen the participation of under-represented groups in the R project and in related activities, such as the *useR!* conference. This report rounds up activities of the taskforce during the second half of 2020.

useR! 2020 breakout session: Supporting diversity in the R community

In this breakout session at *useR! 2020*, a panel shared their experience as members of marginalized groups or as allies, then responded to Q&A from *useR!* participants. The panel was chaired by Laura Ación (**LatinR** co-founder) and Shelmith Kariuki (**AfricaR** co-founder), and the panelists were Yanina Bellini Saibene (**R-Ladies** Global Team and **LatinR** co-founder), Laís Carvalho (Python Ireland board member), Richard Ngamita (**KampalaR** founder and Forwards Community Team member), Danielle Smalls-Perkins (**MiR** co-founder), Robin Williams (**Blind R User Group** member), and Greg Wilson (Software Carpentry co-founder and Education team member at RStudio).

The panel discussed a range of barriers to participation, such as language barriers, limited access to education and conferences, specific challenges faced by visually impaired folk and feelings of isolation due to location or identity. They highlighted some positive steps the R community has made to promote inclusion, for example, founding groups such as Forwards, R-Ladies, AfricaR, MiR and the Blind R User Group; offering diversity scholarships at R conferences and developing technical solutions to improve accessibility. However, the panel also raised the need for greater inclusion of people from minority groups in decision-making and for accessibility to be at the centre of R development and R community events. Allies were recommended to work closely with affinity groups and to base actions on established research, for example following the **Ally Skills Workshop** (material available under CC BY-SA 4.0). Further suggestions made in the Q&A included offering more tutorials/materials in languages other than English, subtitling videos and offering live streaming.

The full video of the session is available on **YouTube** with live chat replay. This session was organized by Forwards members Damiano Cerasuolo, Jonathan Godfrey, Liz Hare, Tatjana Kecojevic, Imke Mayer, Kevin O'Brien, Noa Tamir and Heather Turner.

R Contribution Working Group

Partly in response to the *useR!* breakout session, Forwards established a group to work on initiatives to encourage new contributors to R core, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. The R Contribution Working Group is open to anyone interested in working towards this goal and representatives from R Core, the R Foundation, Forwards, R-Ladies, MiR, the R Consortium Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, as well as members of the general R community have joined in. The group has met every 1-2 months since July 2020, alternating between the second Friday of the month, 15:00 UTC and the second Tuesday of the month, 21:00 UTC.

The group recently created the **R Contribution Site** to host information for people interested in contributing to R core, which has information on a Slack group that people can join to discuss related issues and support each other in progressing as R contributors. Other initiatives include planning contributor-focused events for *useR! 2021*. Minutes of meetings and work in progress is gathered in the public **rcontribution repository on Forwards GitHub**.

Introduction to R Workshop, Lomé, Togo

A 2-day Introduction to R workshop in Lomé, Togo, was held on 16-17 December 2020. The workshop was organized by Anicet Ebou, a member of the AfricaR leadership team based in Ivory Coast. The objective was to introduce people to R and plant the seeds for a local R User Group (as far as we are aware, there is no R-related meetup in Togo). The workshop was co-taught by Audrey Addablah, a leader of Abidjan R User Group (Ivory Coast) and supported by the Why R? Foundation and the R Consortium, as well as Forwards and AfricaR.



Figure 1: Anicet Ebou (left) and Audrey Addablah (right) teaching at the workshop in Lomé, Togo

Audrey and Anicet introduced the workshop participants to handling and visualising data in R. More than 20 people attended the event, including students and professionals from a range of sectors. The participants showed a real interest and we are hopeful that training will continue online and in person in future months.

Latin America Survey

Paola Corrales and Claudia Huaylla joined the Forwards survey team to collaborate on a survey of R users that were born or currently live in Latin America. The survey received close to 1000 responses and they are currently working with other Latin American R users to analyse the results, with a view to report further in 2021.

Package Development Modules

The teaching team have been working on modularizing the Forwards package development workshop materials (developed under a grant from the R Consortium to run [Workshops for Women and Girls](#)). Emma Rand and Mine Çetinkaya-Rundel plan to teach the first three modules online, February 1-3, 2021, at 14:30-15:30 UTC each day. You can register for the modules on eventbrite: [Packages in a nutshell](#), [Setting up your system](#), [Your first package!](#).

Changes in Membership

New members

We welcome the following members to the taskforce:

- Community team: s gwynn sturdevant.
- Conferences team: Miljenka Vuko, Becca Wilson.
- On-ramps team: Jyoti Bhogal, Michael Chirico, Maya Gans, Saranjeet Kaur Bhogal.
- Social media team: Maria Prokofieva.

- Surveys team: Pavitra Chakravarty, Paola Corrales, Claudia Huaylla, Anna Vasyltysya (co-leader).
- Teaching team: Mine Çetinkaya-Rundel (co-leader).

Previous members

The following members have stepped down:

- Conferences team: Jesse Mostipak.
- On-ramps team: Zhian N. Kamvar, Charlotte Wickham.
- Social media team: David Smith.
- Teaching team: Angela Li (co-leader), Dorris Scott.

We thank them for their contribution to the taskforce.

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