

The OMERACT Emerging Leaders Program: The Good, the Bad, and the Future

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ABSTRACT. Objective. To describe the experience of the first OMERACT Emerging Leaders Program (ELP).
Methods. A Delphi process identified positive aspects, areas for improvement, and future directions. Core items were defined as essential if they received $\geq 70\%$ ratings.
Results. Participants valued relatable/accessible mentors (100%), including an OMERACT Executive mentor (100%), and a support network of peers (90%). Key items for future development were funding support (100%) and developing knowledge about OMERACT processes (90%) and politics (80%).
Conclusion. The ELP has the potential to provide targeted training for early career researchers to develop relevant skills for future leadership roles within OMERACT. (First Release March 1 2019; J Rheumatol 2019;46:1047–52; doi:10.3899/jrheum.181126)

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Outcome Measures in Rheumatology (OMERACT) is an international network of patients, clinicians, researchers, methodologists, and industry representatives that aims to improve and standardize outcome measurement in musculoskeletal clinical trials through a data-driven consensus process^{1,2}. At a biennial conference, delegates have the opportunity to review and debate evidence presented by the working groups (WG) in facilitated sessions. Views expressed in these breakout sessions are then discussed with the wider group at a plenary session, and final consensus is sought through interactive voting¹. A key principle of OMERACT is that all delegates have an active role. To help new delegates navigate the process and effectively contribute, education programs, including the Newbies³, Fellows, and Patient Programs, have been developed⁴.

The Fellows program was developed to educate and mentor early career researchers in the methods of OMERACT. It involves an opening session introducing participants to OMERACT's history, philosophy, concept, and process, followed by daily mentor sessions to ensure comprehension and solidify understanding⁴.

Until 2018, participants could only attend the OMERACT Fellow program once, becoming regular delegates at subsequent meetings⁴. This model presented a lost opportunity for OMERACT to further develop "returning fellows" with the skills, knowledge, experience, and networks needed to develop into OMERACT leadership roles such as a WG co-chair, or member of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

Each OMERACT emerging leader (EL) was assigned 3 fellows to mentor. Daily sessions provided the EL with skills training and mentoring. EL were an available resource for WG needing rapporteurs. This report describes participants' experiences and suggestions for improving the ELP.

What were the positive aspects of the ELP? Twenty positive aspects of the program were identified (Table 2). All items received > 70% consensus that they were important or essential to the success of the ELP in rounds 1 and 2, and ≥ 80% consensus in Round 3. Twelve items received ≥ 70% consensus that they were essential to the success of the program (Table 2). The top 5 according to mean score (range 0–9) were “conveners as relatable/accessible mentors” (mean 8.8, 100% consensus); “having a support network of peers” (mean 8.6, 90% consensus); “OMERACT Executive representative as a mentor” (mean 8.5, 100% consensus); “development and strengthening of networks with other EL” (mean 8.3, 100% consensus); and “having a purpose at OMERACT in addition to the standard program” (e.g., having an identity beyond being a delegate, having dedicated evening sessions; mean 8.2, 100% consensus).

What are the areas for improvement for the ELP? Six areas for improvement were identified (Table 2). Five items received ≥ 70% consensus that they were either important or essential to the success of the ELP in Round 1 and were taken forward to Round 2. Four items received > 70% consensus that they were either important or essential in Round 2 and were taken forward to Round 3. In Round 3, all 4 remaining items reached ≥ 80% consensus that they were either important or essential (Table 2). Ranked by mean score, these were “discovering extra responsibilities as EL after agreeing to participate” (mean 8.8, 80% consensus); “not being sure what to expect from the program” (mean 8.6, 100% consensus); “lack of planned sessions to spend time with mentees” (mean 8.5, 80% consensus); and “being given short notice when asked to participate in the ELP” (mean 8.3, 100% consensus). Consensus was reached (100%) that being given short notice to participate was an important item but not essential. However, no consensus could be reached on whether the remaining items were important or essential.

What solutions do you propose to improve the ELP? Twenty-three solutions to improve the ELP were identified, including 12 added during Round 1 of the Delphi (Table 2). All items received > 70% consensus that they were either important or essential for future development of the program in rounds 1 and 2 and ≥ 90% consensus in Round 3. Thirteen items received ≥ 70% consensus that they were essential for future development of the ELP (Table 2). The top 5 according to mean score (range 0–9) were “funding support for EL” (mean 8.4, 100% consensus); “opportunity to gain higher level knowledge about OMERACT (technical) processes” (i.e., the methods required for the development and endorsement of core domain and outcome measurement sets; mean 7.8, 90% consensus); “opportunity to gain higher level knowledge about OMERACT politics” (the governance and operational structure, e.g., how to establish a special interest group, how to navigate the route to become a WG co-chair, or of the TAG or Executive; mean 7.7, 80% consensus); “opportunity to learn about WG structures and how they

should be led/managed” (mean 7.6, 100% consensus); and “opportunity to learn facilitation skills” (mean 7.5, 100% consensus).

Nine EL (100%) reported that the ELP was successful, and that they would take part in a similar program in the future and would recommend it to a colleague.

DISCUSSION

Our report describes the first OMERACT ELP, and identifies positive aspects, areas for improvement, and potential solutions for developing the program. The pilot program was well received with all the participants reporting that they considered it successful, would take part in future similar programs, and would recommend it to colleagues.

Items receiving consensus as essential to the success of the program were predominantly related to mentorship and support, personal and professional development, and contributing to “collaboration and collegiality” of OMERACT. The latter has been previously reported as a key aspect delegates value about OMERACT⁶. However, to our knowledge, the importance of developing specific skills in younger OMERACT participants such as mentoring, delivering effective feedback, and facilitation has not previously been reported. Opportunities for practical skill development in a supportive environment likely contributed to the perceived value of this program⁷.

Other benefits included the positive experience associated with mentoring. This was the first year that fellows were allocated an EL mentor in addition to their OMERACT Executive mentor. This extra level of support provided further opportunities for mentoring skill development, peer support, and networking.

No areas for improvement were considered essential to the success of the ELP. This was the first time this program was implemented with limited planning time, therefore areas for improvement relating to more information and advance notice will be easily addressed for OMERACT 2020.

Funding support for EL to attend OMERACT received the highest mean score for improving the ELP. It is likely that this reflects the difficulty faced by early career researchers in accessing institutional funding needed to attend OMERACT meetings. Areas for future development felt to be essential focused on opportunities to learn more about the technical processes and politics of OMERACT, continuing to develop existing skills, and contributing to OMERACT in more senior roles. Ideas for skills development fell into 3 broad categories: (1) mentoring and feedback; (2) methodology, process, and politics; and (3) facilitation and leadership. As EL numbers increase in future years, and with limited time available at each meeting to deliver targeted face-to-face workshops, a proposed model for future ELP with 3 streams is shown in Figure 1. This model provides a structure that aligns with the skills, knowledge, and experience required to take on leadership roles in OMERACT.

Table 2. Consensus scores on the Emerging Leaders Program (n = 10).

Domain	Item	Round 1 Essential/ Important	Round 2 Essential/ Important	Mean	Round 3 Essential/ Important	Important
Positive aspects of the Emerging Leaders Program	Conveners (BR & PST) reliable/accessible mentors	100%	100%	8.8	100%	0%
	Support network of peers	100%	100%	8.6	100%	10%
	OMERACT Executive representative as a mentor	100%	100%	8.5	100%	0%
	Development and strengthening of networks with other emerging leaders*	N/A	100%	8.3	100%	0%
	Having a purpose at OMERACT in addition to the standard program	100%	100%	8.2	100%	0%
	Small size of the group providing more intimacy and better peer support/more attention from mentors	100%	100%	8	100%	0%
	Extra training received	90%	100%	7.9	100%	20%
	Platform to help you develop yourself	100%	100%	7.8	100%	0%
	Opportunities to contribute/participate in the OMERACT program	100%	100%	7.6	100%	30%
	Opportunity to debrief any difficult issues daily	100%	100%	7.5	100%	30%
	Whatsapp group to share information and support	80%	90%	7.4	90%	40%
	Streamlined program for more targeted skill development*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	20%
	The opportunity to be part of OMERACT's succession planning	100%	100%	7.3	100%	40%
	Having a role within the OMERACT community	100%	100%	7.2	100%	50%
	Aim/mission defined at the start of the meeting	90%	90%	6.8	100%	30%
	Opportunity to mentor the fellows	100%	100%	6.8	100%	70%
	Potential for a career track moving toward OMERACT Executive	80%	80%	6.5	80%	20%
	Contribute to development of OMERACT educational resources*	N/A	100%	6.4	100%	70%
	Opportunity to critique the fellows's posters	90%	100%	6.4	100%	50%
	The feeling of "giving back" to OMERACT	80%	80%	6.1	80%	50%
Areas for improvement of the Emerging Leaders Program	Discovering extra responsibilities as emerging leaders after agreeing to participate	80%	80%	8.8	80%	20%
	Not being sure what to expect from the program	100%	100%	8.6	100%	60%
	Lack of planned sessions to spend time with mentees	80%	80%	8.5	80%	60%
	Being given short notice when asked to participate in the returning Fellows/Emerging Leaders Program	100%	100%	8.3	100%	100%
	No opportunity for the Emerging Leaders group to meet and build rapport before meeting the fellows	70%	60%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Difficult to find assigned fellow mentees at the introductory session	60%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Suggestions for improving the Emerging Leaders Program	100%	100%	8.4	100%	0%
	Funding support for the Emerging Leaders group to recognize contribution	N/A	90%	7.8	100%	10%
	Program should include opportunity to learn higher-level knowledge about OMERACT processes*	N/A	90%	7.7	100%	20%
	Program should include opportunity to learn higher-level knowledge about OMERACT politics*	N/A	100%	7.6	100%	0%
Suggestions for improving the Emerging Leaders Program	Emerging leaders to receive training on the ideal structure of working groups: co-chairs, patient partners, researchers, and how groups should be led/managed*	N/A	100%	7.5	100%	0%
	Program should include opportunity to learn facilitation skills*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	10%
	Emerging leaders to receive training in how OMERACT functions in terms of financing working groups, e.g., supporting patient partners and fellow to attend*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	10%
	Program should include opportunity to learn mentoring skills*	100%	100%	7.4	100%	10%
	Provide advance notice of being asked to participate in the Emerging Leaders Program	100%	100%	7.4	100%	20%
	Provide more skills development that provides direction toward membership of Executive/TAG	N/A	100%	7.3	100%	40%
	Opportunity to shadow an Executive/Chair/Facilitator during the meeting*	N/A	100%	7.2	100%	0%
	Program should include opportunity to learn rapporteur skills*	N/A	100%		100%	

Table 2. Continued.

Domain	Item	Round 1 Essential/ Important	Round 2 Essential/ Important	Mean	Round 3 Essential/ Important	Important
Emerging Leaders Program	A clear program with additional responsibilities provided at the point of inviting to join	100%	100%	7.1	100%	40%
	Emerging fellows matched with an Executive as a mentor	90%	90%	7.1	90%	10%
	Provide a clear pathway for development that could lead to Executive/TAG	100%	100%	7	100%	30%
	Emerging leaders to receive training in potential resources that may be available through OMERACT, e.g., Delphi manager*	N/A	100%	6.9	100%	30%
	Program should include opportunity to learn to give effective feedback/critical appraisal*	N/A	100%	6.9	100%	40%
	An opportunity to formally meet during the 2 yrs between OMERACT meetings, i.e., at EULAR, ACR, similar to other OMERACT Working Groups*	N/A	100%	6.3	100%	60%
	Task for Executive mentor to introduce emerging leaders to a potential new collaborator/connection	100%	100%	6.2	100%	70%
	More structure to initial meeting of emerging leaders and fellows to aid finding each other	90%	100%	5.9	100%	80%
	Emerging leaders joining fellows for some of their sessions to critique or support their feedback	100%	100%	5.8	100%	90%
	Set time in the program for mentors and mentees to talk to each other (e.g., wellness issues)	100%	100%	5.8	100%	100%
ACR: American College of Rheumatology; EULAR: European League Against Rheumatism;	Task for emerging leaders to introduce each other to a potential new collaborator/connection	100%	100%	5.8	100%	90%
	Program should be offered to all those who have attended a previous OMERACT (opt in)*	N/A	80%	5.5	90%	70%

* Item added at the end of Round 1. Significant data are in bold face. OMERACT: Outcome Measures in Rheumatology; TAG: Technical Advisory Group; EULAR: European League Against Rheumatism; ACR: American College of Rheumatology; N/A: not applicable.

This report is limited by the small number of participants from only 2 continents. However, all EL took part and 100% completion was achieved in all rounds of the Delphi survey. Important positive areas were identified and key suggestions for development of the ELP have been formulated.

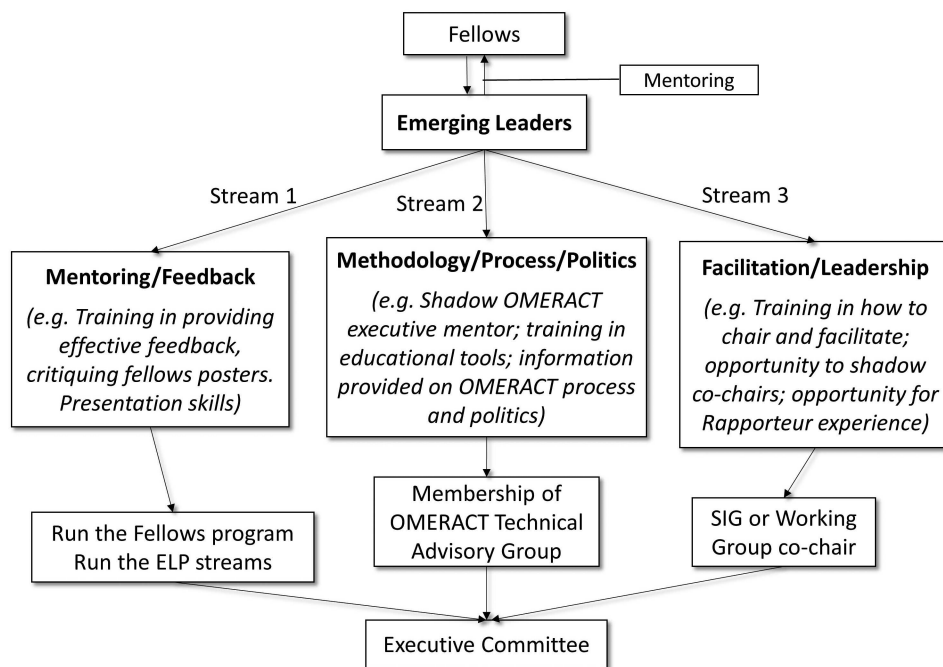
The 2018 OMERACT ELP was positively received and provided a targeted, supportive training opportunity for early career researchers. Inclusion of an ELP program in future OMERACT meetings is recommended. For inclusivity, opening the ELP invitation to all returning OMERACT participants (including returning “newbies” and returning EL) should be considered. Encouraging cross-generational relationships with formal mentoring, providing skills-based learning opportunities, and sharing institutional knowledge may benefit OMERACT regarding succession planning, efficiency of process, and organizational culture.

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Nb: These are potential rather than guaranteed OMERACT career tracks. ELs could choose to take part in more than one ELP stream over time

Figure 1. Flow diagram for potential streamlining of the OMERACT Emerging Leaders Program. OMERACT: Outcome Measures in Rheumatology; EL: emerging leaders; ELP: Emerging Leaders Program; SIG: Special Interest Group.