

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 $\geq 70\%$ ratings of being 'essential'.

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.

Outcome Measures in Rheumatology (OMERACT) is an international network of patients, clinicians, researchers, methodologists, and industry representatives, which aims to improve and standardise 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 (WGs) 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 via interactive voting (1). 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 Newbies (3), Fellows, and Patient programs, have been developed (4).

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 history, philosophy, concept and process, followed by daily mentor sessions to ensure comprehension and solidify understanding (4).

Until 2018, participants could only attend the OMERACT Fellow program once, becoming regular delegates at subsequent meetings (4). 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 working group co-chair, or member of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) or the Executive, and thus ensure sustainability. Following feedback from OMERACT 2016, and to address this gap, the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) was piloted at OMERACT 2018.

Each OMERACT Emerging Leader (EL) was assigned three Fellows to mentor, daily sessions provided skills training and mentoring, and ELs were an available resource for WGs needing rapporteurs. This report describes participants’ experiences, and suggestions for improving the ELP.

Materials and Methods

Participants: Fourteen registered returning OMERACT Fellows were invited to participate in the ELP by email two weeks before the meeting. The email described the ELP as “a new initiative to better support you and offer you opportunities to develop valuable networks and skills. As future leaders of OMERACT, we are keen to support you in developing more advanced skills and competencies in the OMERACT Process and Methods”. Of these 9/14 took part in the ELP (described in Table 1). Of the five returning fellows choosing not to participate, two of them cited insufficient time within the OMERACT conference as a reason, others did not provide a reason. Following the meeting, all participants and the ELP convener were invited to take part in a Delphi survey (n=10) to evaluate the ELP. Demographic data were collected via email.

Delphi Process: The Delphi process (5) was used to identify: (1) What were the positive aspects of the ELP? (2) What are the areas for improvement for the ELP? (3) What solutions do you propose to improve the ELP? At OMERACT 2018 the Emerging Leaders were asked to brainstorm possible responses (‘items’) for each of these questions, which were recorded by an experienced facilitator (BR). Participants were invited to submit additional items to the lead author (CF) by email. The Delphi survey was conducted online using DelphiManager. Participants scored each item from 1 to 9 into categories of not important (1-3); important (4-6); and essential (7-9). Items receiving $\geq 70\%$ consensus as important/essential (4-9) were taken forward into the next round. At the end of Round 1, participants were invited to provide additional items for inclusion in subsequent rounds. In Rounds 2 and 3 participants were shown their previous response, and the percentage distribution of other participants’ responses for each item.

Finally, the 9 ELs were asked three yes/no questions: ‘Overall do you think the ELP was successful?’, ‘Would you consider taking part in a similar program in the future?’, and ‘Would you recommend the ELP to a colleague?’.

Ethics approval was not required. Tacit consent to publish these data was received as all participants have contributed as co-authors.

Results

Participants: All nine ELs and one ELP convener (BR) participated in all three rounds of the Delphi survey (n=10). The majority (9/10) were female with a mean age of 37 years (SD: 3.60). Five were from the UK and five were from Australia. Four ELs were Rheumatologists, three were researchers, one was a Consultant Podiatrist and one a Biomedical Engineer, the EL convener was a Rheumatologist.

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 & 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 five 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 ELs' (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 four remaining items reached ≥80% consensus that they were *either* important or essential (Table 2). Ranked by mean score, these were 'discovering extra responsibilities as ELs after agreeing to participate' (mean: 6.3; consensus 80%); 'not being sure what to expect from the program' (mean: 6.3; consensus: 100%); 'lack of planned sessions to spend time with mentees' (mean: 5.6; consensus: 80%); and 'being given short notice when asked to participate in the ELP' (mean: 5.4; 100%). Consensus was

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reached (100%) that being given short notice to participate was important but not essential. However, no consensus could be reached on whether 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 & 2 and $\geq 90\%$ consensus in Round 3. Thirteen items received $\geq 70\%$ consensus that they were *essential* for future development of the ELP (Table 2). The top five according to mean score (range 0-9) were 'funding support for ELs' (Mean: 8.4; Consensus: 100%); '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; Consensus: 90%); 'opportunity to gain higher level knowledge about OMERACT politics' (the governance and operational structure e.g. how to establish a SIG, how to navigate the route to become a WG co-chair, or of the TAG or Executive) (Mean: 7.7; Consensus: 80%); 'opportunity to learn about working group structures and how they should be led/managed' (Mean: 7.6; Consensus: 100%); and 'opportunity to learn facilitation skills' (Mean: 7.5; Consensus: 100%).

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

Discussion

This report describes the first OMERACT ELP, and identifies positive aspects, areas for improvement and potential solutions for developing the program. The pilot program was received well with all participants reporting 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 OMERACT (6). However, 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 program (7).

Other benefits included the positive experience associated with mentoring. This was the first year 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 ELs to attend OMERACT received the highest mean score for improving the ELP. It is likely 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, focussed 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 three broad categories: Mentoring and feedback; Methodology, process and politics; and 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 ELPs with three 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.

This report is limited by the small number of participants from only two continents. However, all ELs 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 ELs) should be considered. Encouraging cross-generational relationships with formal mentoring, providing skills-based learning opportunities and sharing institutional knowledge may benefit OMERACT in terms of succession planning, efficiency of process and organisational culture.

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Table 1: Format of the OMERACT 2018 Emerging Leaders pilot program

Session	Description	Structure	Knowledge/Skills
Pre-OMERACT	All Emerging Leader (EL) participants sent information about the goals of the program as well as supporting educational materials	Sent by email one week prior to OMERACT 2018	
	Each EL assigned three Fellows to mentor during the OMERACT meeting	Sent by email one day prior to OMERACT 2018	
Day 1: Opening Session	Combined with Fellows introductory session, providing an opportunity for ELs to meet their assigned Fellows	One hour, face-to-face, facilitated by two moderators	
Day 2: Introductory Session	Background to the EL program was given; participants introduced themselves and identified their goals for the program; practical training was given in mentorship and how to deliver effective feedback to OMERACT Fellows	Three hours, face-to-face, facilitated by two moderators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understood the context and learning objectives for the EL program. • Goal setting • Gained skills in mentorship and providing feedback
Days 2-5: Reflective Evening Sessions	The content was led by the needs of the group. This included the opportunity to debrief and receive peer support, revisit goals and how to achieve them, and further discuss more advanced OMERACT process (e.g. creating a new SIG)	One hour each evening, face-to-face, facilitated by two moderators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained skills in mentorship and providing feedback • Individualised personal development by working through personal goals • Gained knowledge in advanced OMERACT processes • Developed peer support networks • Improved collaboration networks
Other opportunities	ELs were invited to attend a skills development session on facilitation skills	One hour, face-to-face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed facilitation skills
	ELs critiqued the Fellows posters	One hour, face-to-face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed skills in mentorship and providing feedback
	ELs appointed as rapporteurs when required by working groups	Assigned through the EL conveners following contact from the working group leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed rapporteur skills (note-taking, summarising and presenting) • Contributed to the wider OMERACT program

Table 2: Consensus scores on the Emerging Leaders program (n=10)

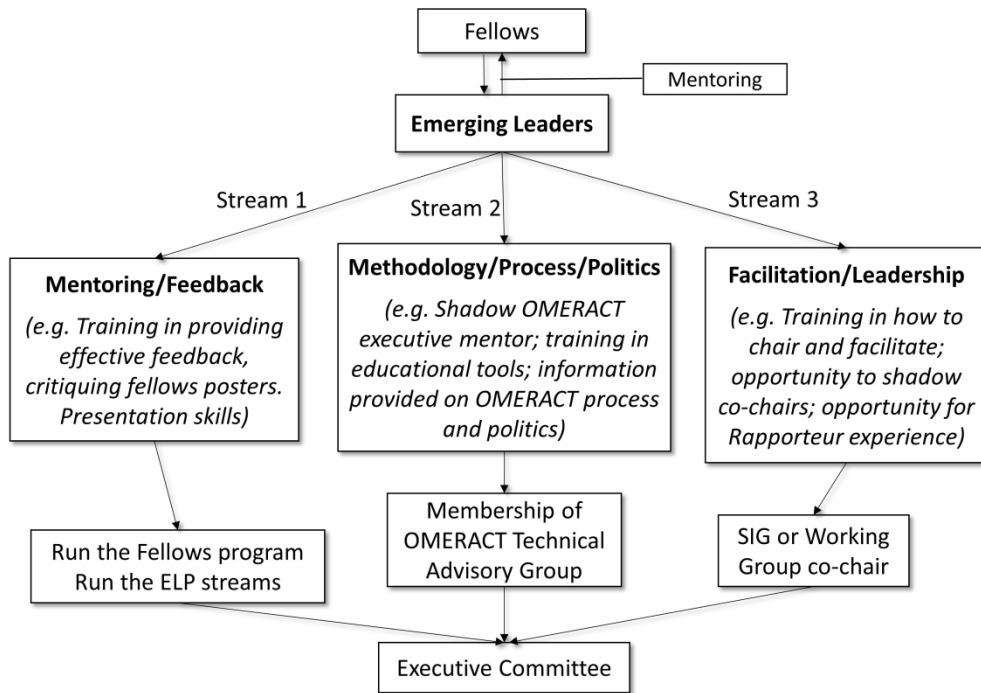
Domain	Item	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3			
		Essential /Important	Essential/ Important	Mean	Essential/ Important	Essential	Important
Positive aspects of the emerging leaders program	Convenors (BR & PT) relatable/accessible mentors	100%	100%	8.8	100%	100%	0%
	Support network of peers	100%	100%	8.6	100%	90%	10%
	OMERACT Executive representative as a mentor	100%	100%	8.5	100%	100%	0%
	Development and strengthening of networks with other emerging leaders*	N/A	100%	8.3	100%	100%	0%
	Having a purpose at OMERACT in addition to the standard programme	100%	100%	8.2	100%	100%	0%
	Small size of the group providing more intimacy and better peer support/more attention from mentors	100%	100%	8	100%	100%	0%
	Extra training received	90%	100%	7.9	100%	80%	20%
	Platform to help you develop yourself	100%	100%	7.8	100%	100%	0%
	Opportunities to contribute/participate in the OMERACT programme	100%	100%	7.6	100%	70%	30%
	Opportunity to debrief any difficult issues daily	100%	100%	7.5	100%	70%	30%
	Whatsapp group to share information and support	80%	90%	7.4	90%	50%	40%
	Streamlined program for more targeted skill development*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	80%	20%
	The opportunity to be part of OMERACT's succession planning	100%	100%	7.3	100%	60%	40%
	Having a role within the OMERACT community	100%	100%	7.2	100%	50%	50%
	Aim/mission defined at the start of the meeting	90%	90%	6.8	100%	70%	30%
	Opportunity to mentor the fellows	100%	100%	6.8	100%	30%	70%
	Potential for a career track moving towards OMERACT Exec	80%	80%	6.5	80%	60%	20%
	Contribute to development of OMERACT educational resources*	N/A	100%	6.4	100%	30%	70%
	Opportunity to critique the fellows posters	90%	100%	6.4	100%	50%	50%

	The feeling of 'giving' back to OMERACT	80%	80%	6.1	80%	30%	50%
Areas for improvement of the emerging leaders program	Discovering extra responsibilities as emerging leaders after agreeing to participate	80%	80%	8.8	80%	60%	20%
	Not being sure what to expect from the programme	100%	100%	8.6	100%	40%	60%
	Lack of planned sessions to spend time with mentees	80%	80%	8.5	80%	20%	60%
	Being given short notice when asked to participate in the returning fellows/emerging leaders programme	100%	100%	8.3	100%	0%	100%
	No opportunity for emerging leaders group to meet and build a rapport before meeting the fellows	70%	60%	N/A	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	N/A
Suggestions for improving the emerging leaders program	Funding support for the emerging leaders group to recognise contribution	100%	100%	8.4	100%	100%	0%
	Program should include opportunity to learn higher level knowledge about OMERACT processes*	N/A	90%	7.8	100%	90%	10%
	Program should include opportunity to learn higher level knowledge about OMERACT politics*	N/A	90%	7.7	100%	80%	20%
	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%	7.6	100%	100%	0%
	Program should include opportunity to learn Facilitation Skills*	N/A	100%	7.5	100%	100%	0%
	Emerging leaders to receive training in how OMERACT functions in terms of financing working groups eg supporting patient partners and fellow to attend*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	90%	10%

Program should include opportunity to learn Mentoring Skills*	N/A	100%	7.4	100%	90%	10%
Provide advance notice of being asked to participate in the emerging leaders programme	100%	100%	7.4	100%	90%	10%
Provide more skills development that provide direction towards membership of Exec / TAG	100%	100%	7.4	100%	80%	20%
Opportunity to shadow an Exec/Chair/Facilitator during the meeting*	N/A	100%	7.3	100%	60%	40%
Program should include opportunity to learn Rapporteur Skills*	N/A	100%	7.2	100%	100%	0%
A clear programme with additional responsibilities provided at the point of inviting to join emerging leaders programme	100%	100%	7.1	100%	60%	40%
Emerging fellows matched with an Exec as a mentor	90%	90%	7.1	90%	80%	10%
Provide a clear pathway for development that could lead to Exec / TAG	100%	100%	7	100%	70%	30%
Emerging leaders to receive training in potential resources that may be available via OMERACT eg Delphi manager*	N/A	100%	6.9	100%	70%	30%
Program should include opportunity to learn to give effective feedback / critical appraisal*	N/A	100%	6.9	100%	60%	40%
An opportunity to formally meet during the two years between OMERACT meetings i.e. at EULAR; ACR like other OMERACT Working Groups do*	N/A	100%	6.3	100%	40%	60%
Task for Exec mentor to introduce emerging leaders to a potential new collaborator/connection	100%	100%	6.2	100%	30%	70%
More structure to initial meeting of emerging leaders and fellows to aid finding each other	90%	100%	5.9	100%	20%	80%

Emerging leaders joining fellows for some of their sessions to critique or support their feedback	100%	100%	5.8	100%	10%	90%
Set time in the programme for mentors and mentees to talk to each other (e.g. wellness issues)	100%	100%	5.8	100%	0%	100%
Task for emerging leaders to introduce each other to a potential new collaborator/connection	100%	100%	5.8	100%	10%	90%
Program should be offered to all those who have attended a previous OMERACT (Opt in)*	N/A	80%	5.5	90%	20%	70%

*Item added at the end of Round 1



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

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