

RNA Canada ARN – President’s Report 2025

Presented at the Annual General Meeting of Members
January 12, 2026

Prof. Sherif Abou Elela, President

Introduction

The past two years have been transformative for RNA Canada ARN. In 2024, the organization focused on building the foundations of a sustainable national structure. In 2025, the emphasis shifted to capacity building—consolidating RNA Canada ARN’s role as a fully operational, federally recognized education charity with a broad national mandate.

RNA Canada ARN now brings together more than **348 members**, including researchers, trainees, clinicians, and industry partners from across Canada. This growing community has expanded national coordination, launched major programs, strengthened training and outreach, and further established RNA Canada ARN as a recognized voice for RNA science, innovation, and workforce development.

This report outlines key achievements since the January 2025 AGM, highlights remaining challenges, and presents strategic priorities for 2026.

Strategic Goals for 2025

Work in 2025 was guided by five strategic goals:

1. **Public Recognition** – Establish RNA Canada ARN as a credible national voice.
2. **Organizational Stability** – Formalize governance structures and build operational capacity.
3. **Service Development** – Deliver programs, training, and national initiatives for the RNA community.
4. **Financial Sustainability** – Build diversified revenue streams and long-term fundraising capacity.
5. **Government Engagement** – Position RNA Canada ARN as a trusted partner in science and innovation policy.

1. Public Recognition and National Visibility

In 2025, RNA Canada ARN significantly expanded its national visibility, strengthened regional networks, and improved communication with members, partners, and policymakers. The organization is increasingly recognized as a unified national voice for RNA research through quarterly newsletters, an active website, social media outreach, and participation in national and regional RNA meetings.

Participation in **RiboWest**, **TREnD**, and **RiboClub 2025** reinforced connections across all regions and provided a platform to introduce new national programs, awards, EDI initiatives, and trainee development activities. The inclusion of **patient and clinician panels** at these meetings deepened engagement with communities directly affected by RNA-related diseases and highlighted the societal relevance of RNA research across Canada.

Quarterly newsletters were expanded and improved, incorporating opinion pieces, policy updates, educational content, and recognition of Canadian achievements. Communication pipelines with universities, research institutes, and partner organizations were strengthened to ensure broad awareness of RNA Canada ARN programs.

Beyond the academic and biomedical sectors, RNA Canada ARN increased its visibility with **Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada**, the **Canola Growers Association**, and agricultural networks, reinforcing the cross-sector relevance of RNA technologies. RNA Canada ARN was also showcased to government officials and research leaders during the **Leaders' Retreat** in September 2025.

In partnership with **AREnA Québec**, the organization co-hosted the first national **Industry–Researcher Roundtable**, introducing RNA Canada ARN to leaders from **D2R** and Canadian biotechnology companies and initiating structured dialogue on cross-sector collaboration.

2. Organizational Structure and Governance Development

In 2025, RNA Canada ARN strengthened its governance and operational capacity by expanding its committee structure, formalizing internal processes, and improving national coordination.

Two new committees were created to address emerging priorities:

- **Strategic Planning & Government Advocacy Committee (SPGAC)** – Leads development of the *National Canadian RNA Research Strategy* and coordinates federal engagement.



- **Research Funding Information & Coordination Committee (RFIC)** – Identifies major strategic funding opportunities and supports coordination of national consortia and multi-institutional grant applications.

With these additions, RNA Canada ARN now operates through seven standing committees:

- Outreach & Meetings
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)
- Education
- Membership & Analytics
- Industry Liaison
- Strategic Planning & Government Advocacy (SPGAC)
- Research Funding Information & Coordination (RFIC)

Each committee operates under clear Terms of Reference, coordinated annual goals, and measurable deliverables. Oversight is provided by the **Vice-Chair of the Board** and an **Executive Committee liaison**, ensuring alignment and accountability across the organization.

Committee membership includes six standing members supported by a variable number of **ad hoc contributors**, including faculty at different career stages and committed trainees who generously volunteer their time.

An **ad hoc Awards Committee**, composed of national and international experts, ensures rigorous and impartial selection of annual award recipients.

Science & Industry Advisory Committee (SIAC)

The **Science & Industry Advisory Committee (SIAC)**, chaired by **Dr. John Mattick**, provides independent, high-level feedback regarding the strategic directions of RNA Canada ARN. The council includes **14 leaders** from biotechnology, agriculture, medicine, genomics, and innovation policy.

At its first in-person meeting in September 2025, SIAC reviewed organizational progress, provided detailed feedback on national initiatives, and provided recommendations on strengthening the National RNA Strategy, government engagement, fundraising, and cross-sector integration. Key recommendations included articulating a clear national value proposition, strengthening representation from agriculture and defense, enhancing federal communication strategies, and expanding operational capacity.

These insights directly shape RNA Canada ARN's 2026 priorities.

3. Member Benefits Package

In 2025, RNA Canada ARN accelerated the development of a comprehensive Member Benefits Package designed to provide meaningful, career-enhancing value to trainees, researchers, clinicians, and industry partners across Canada. This package reflects the organization's commitment to supporting excellence, national connectivity, and equitable access to opportunities.

Benefits Delivered in 2025

Training and Professional Development

Members gained access to Peer-to-Peer Skill Transfer Workshops, technical workshops in RNA chemistry and sequencing, virtual career panels, and hands-on training programs, strengthening technical capacity and career readiness.

National Awards and Recognition

The Moderna–RNA Canada ARN Discovery of the Year, Trainee of the Year, and Volunteer of the Year awards celebrated excellence and leadership across Canada, with awardees featured in newsletters, on the website, and in video profiles.

National Job Board and Career Resources

A centralized job board and improved communication pipelines increased visibility of training and employment opportunities across academia, industry, and government.

Networking Opportunities Across Three National Meetings

Members benefited from coordinated programming and enhanced visibility at **RiboWest**, **TREnD**, and **RiboClub**, creating new opportunities for cross-regional collaboration.

Public Outreach and RNA Literacy

Members benefited from expanded public-facing content, clinician and patient panels, and national event listings that elevated RNA literacy and community engagement.

Discounted Registration for RNA Canada ARN Programs

Discounts for several national workshops and events were introduced, marking the beginning of a broader membership benefits system.

Enhanced Benefits Planned for 2026

Members-Only Digital Portal

A secure online portal will provide access to training videos, workshop recordings, a national events calendar, grant listings, and career development tools.



Guaranteed Discounts at All Three National RNA Meetings

Beginning in 2026, RNA Canada ARN members will receive **discounted registration** for:

- **RiboClub**
- **TREnD**
- **RiboWest**

These coordinated discounts represent a major milestone in national integration.

Discounts from Canadian RNA Platforms and Partner Companies

RNA Canada ARN is negotiating partnerships to provide members with exclusive discounts on:

- RNA-related services
- Training programs
- Technology platforms
- Registration fees for partner events

These benefits will roll out throughout 2026.

Fellowships, RNA Toolbox Grants, and Travel Awards

Subject to the success of the 2026 fundraising campaign, RNA Canada ARN will launch donor-supported fellowships, RNA Toolbox grants, and travel awards.

National Internship and Career Pathways Program

A structured internship matchmaking initiative will connect trainees with biotechnology companies, start-ups, and research organizations across Canada.

National Mentorship Network

A mentorship program will pair trainees and early-career researchers with senior academic, clinical, and industry leaders.

Public Outreach and Advocacy Opportunities

Members will have the opportunity to participate directly in patient-engagement activities, public education initiatives, and the rollout of the National RNA Strategy.

4. Financial Sustainability, Case for Support, and Fundraising

2025 was a defining period for building RNA Canada ARN's financial framework. With federal charitable status secured, the organization began establishing infrastructure for long-term fundraising.



RNA Canada ARN's first **Case for Support** articulates a national vision for accelerating RNA research and translation across health, agriculture, environment, aquaculture, and biomanufacturing. It positions RNA Canada ARN as a vehicle through which philanthropic investment can drive national impact.

Working with **Global Philanthropic**, the organization established:

- Donor tracking and stewardship systems
- Ethical fundraising standards
- Allocation frameworks for donor-funded programs
- Reporting systems aligned with CRA requirements

Initial engagement with philanthropic foundations, private donors, and industry partners laid early pathways for long-term support. In late 2025, RNA Canada ARN launched its first **internal fundraising campaign**, preparing for broader efforts.

Planning is now underway for RNA Canada ARN's first **national fundraising campaign**, launching in 2026. Funds raised will support fellowships, RNA Toolbox grants, workforce development, public engagement programs, and RNA emergency-readiness initiatives.

5. National Recognition, Federal Engagement, and the National RNA Strategy

In 2025, RNA Canada ARN deepened its engagement with federal agencies and made major progress toward developing a **National RNA Strategy for Canada**. The SPGAC refined the Strategy around seven pillars:

1. Economic growth and return on investment
2. Collaboration and national coordination
3. Training and workforce development
4. Funding and research support
5. Policy and regulatory frameworks
6. Innovation infrastructure
7. Public awareness and engagement

Notably, the Strategy has expanded beyond health to incorporate agriculture, aquaculture, and defense.

RNA Canada ARN held coordinated policy meetings with **CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, PHAC, ISED, CFI, Genome Canada, the U15, NRC, DRDC, and ITK**, establishing itself as a trusted advocate and national convener in RNA science.



A major milestone was the completion of the **National RNA Ecosystem Map**, a comprehensive portrayal of Canada's RNA capabilities across sectors. Developed by **Global Advantage Consulting Group**, this map integrates academic, industrial, regulatory, and infrastructure data, creating a powerful tool for strategic planning and national engagement. Notably, the map is accompanied by a very detailed and comprehensive spreadsheet, which provides a compendium of all financial aspects of RNA research and translation in Canada.

Funds to support development of the Ecosystem Map came from across Canada, including academia (UBC, U. Lethbridge, D2R/McGill U., U. Ottawa, U. Sherbrooke, U. Toronto), industry (Moderna, Northern RNA), provinces (FRQ, ARN Quebec), and affiliated conferences (RiboClub, RiboWest) thanks largely to the sterling efforts of **Benoit Chabot**.

In 2026, the SPGAC will integrate Ecosystem Map findings, expand its consultation, finalize the Strategy, and submit it to the federal government in **September 2026**. Special thanks are extended to **Heather Lennon** for her exceptional coordination and administrative support.

6. Charitable Status and Bylaw Review

A major achievement in 2025 was recognition and approval of RNA Canada ARN as a CRA-recognized **charitable organization**. As described above (Section 4), this now positions RNA Canada ARN to seek foundational support to implement its priorities.

As RNA Canada ARN continues to evolve, aligning bylaws and governance structures charitable status has become a priority. In 2026, the organization will undertake a full review of its bylaws and governance framework to ensure compliance, strengthen accountability, and support expanding charitable activities.

This process will reinforce transparency, protect emerging programs, and prepare the organization for long-term sustainability.

Challenges

Despite significant progress, several challenges remain:

- High volunteer workload and limited professional administrative support
- Variable engagement across regions and committees
- Limited sustained funding for national RNA coordination
- Increasing operational complexity tied to charitable activities
- Need for stable, multi-year financial commitments



Addressing these challenges will be essential for sustaining momentum and fulfilling the organization's national mandate.

Strategic Priorities for 2026

1. Submit the **National RNA Strategy** to the federal government.
 2. Launch the **first national fundraising campaign**.
 3. Establish donor-supported **training programs, fellowships, and RNA Toolbox grants**.
 4. Expand **peer-to-peer workshops** and national training programs.
 5. Modernize **bylaws and governance structures** for charitable status.
 6. Deepen partnerships across **health, agriculture, aquaculture, environment, and defense**.
 7. Strengthen **member benefits**, including discounted registrations, mentorship, Fellowships, toolbox grants, and enhanced career development tools.
-

Conclusion

RNA Canada ARN has entered a new phase of national leadership. As a federally recognized charity with the capacity to raise funds in direct support of the RNA research community, and supported by strong governance, an expanding membership, a robust Case for Support, and a comprehensive National RNA Ecosystem Map, the organization is exceptionally well positioned to guide Canada's RNA future across health, agri-food, natural resources, and other strategic sectors.

My deepest thanks go to all volunteers, committee members, and partners whose dedication made 2025 a year of substantial progress. Together, RNA Canada ARN will continue to build a strong, inclusive, and nationally coordinated RNA community that drives discovery, fosters innovation, and delivers impact for the benefit of all Canadians.

Prof. Sherif Abou Elela
President, RNA Canada ARN