Purpose & Role Work Advisory Group (WAG) Members
Chair: Suchitra Krishnan-Sarin, Yale University, US
Members: Glen Morgan, retired, US
Pebbles Fagan, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, US
Chris Bullen, University of Auckland, NZ Public Health, NZ
Sean David, University of Chicago, US

Section 1: WAG Meetings Overview

Meeting 1: Identifying Issues, Discussion, Outcomes
Advocacy Role and Purpose
- Proactive dissemination of scientific information based on science.
- Transparency to members about how SRNT does its work is critical. Process is important and needs to be communicated.
- Identifying and communicating clearly the Society’s priority role that is most important to the membership.

SRNT Leadership Position and Policies
- SRNT’s focus related to outward facing leadership, and how SRNT interacts with adjacent communities.
- Commitment to transdisciplinarity, considering multiple ways SRNT can expand its footprint in dissemination of the science, and enhance its capacity to cross fertilize with other organizations.

Developing the Next Generation of Researchers
- Training alone is not sufficient. How can SRNT help young investigators RISE in their field, especially when there are not the same opportunities?
- SRNT Trainee Network has this as part of its remit. There is potential to use strategies such as SRNT-U to ensure new investigators are being educated about the basics so their research is robust.
Meeting 2: Member Survey Results, Discussion, Outcomes
Responding members agreed that SRNT is a scientific society whose role is to promote unbiased science and the development of nicotine and tobacco scientists. SRNT should engage with adjacent communities from a scientific standpoint. Public positions should be taken by the Society only when there is clear, verifiable evidence. SRNT leads the field by providing an open forum for the presentation and discussion of science.

Divisions noted in responses underscore the importance of SRNT repeatedly seeking membership perspectives on its role as a scientific society comprised of individual members, especially as individual viewpoints change over time. There is a need for SRNT to be flexible and transparent in responding to changing membership viewpoints in order to accurately reflect and support the majority membership view within the framework of the SRNT Mission and Guiding Principles.

Discussion and Outcomes
The WAG members reviewed the three primary findings from the Member Survey for SRNT Purpose & Role:
1. Finding: Members responding agreed the primary purpose of SRNT is research.
2. Finding: Members responding did not reach consensus about SRNT’s role in other areas.
3. Finding: Members responding want SRNT to be more active in supporting early career researchers, and focus on promoting the science.

Based on these findings, the Purpose & Role WAG members agreed that the Board Guidance Document was helpful for developing a framework to move forward in new directions and to make decisions about SRNT’s purpose and role.

There was further agreement that SRNT’s role is not to form opinions that are politically charged, but to convene experts to bring the best evidence and discuss the process. SRNT is a unique society that enables a multi-disciplinary platform for these discussions to occur, with a core value of primacy of scientific rigor. SRNT’s unique role is not to be the authority or create guidelines, but to be known as a hub or central resource for all available scientific evidence.

The WAG members also noted that the Boundary Standards must work beyond the U.S. borders, and so are broad for a reason. They also noted specifically that SRNT Networks as facilitated by SRNT build relationships and rapport, which is a critical role that SRNT does and needs to continue to do.

Meeting 3: Member Comments Results, Discussion, Recommendations
Thirty-six (36) members provided comments, representing responses from 3% of the SRNT Membership (compared to the 39% response rate from the Member Survey); and 42% of the total number of responses received (86) during the Member Comment Period.

Although there were miscellaneous comments on individual Principles or Standards, two topics identified through the Member Comments specific to Purpose & Role were addressed by the Purpose & Role WAG:
1. Suggested language revision to Guiding Principle 4
2. Clarifying statement about Open Science

Language Revision to Guiding Principle 4: Remaining Neutral on Outstanding Questions
There was agreement that the intent of Guiding Principle 4 is appropriate, but that the use of the word “neutral” created concerns, as it seemed to convey that SRNT might remain silent and not present or disseminate evidence.
There was further agreement that the intent of Guiding Principle 4 is to ensure the fidelity of the science, and to promote knowledge-based advances without any ideological or advocacy agendas. SRNT’s role as a diverse Society is to ensure dialogue about unsettled issues, and to emphasize SRNT’s dissemination of the evidence.

Noting the current pressure for SRNT to take a position in the e-cigarette debate, the WAG members agreed that SRNT needs to be careful that any information presented by SRNT is not positioned to support any one adjacent community’s position or agenda. The WAG members agreed on the following language change:

**Guiding Principle 4: SRNT is Dedicated to Open Science without Bias**

SRNT supports, without bias, the generation, dissemination, and facilitates debate of rigorous science to address challenging public health questions regardless of the direction the evidence leads. SRNT is dedicated to presenting balanced views on unresolved scientific issues and makes every effort not to take positions that support one view over another, thus promoting scientific dialogue and empowering members to make their own informed decisions. Regarding communication beyond the membership, SRNT will follow the evidence, disseminate balanced information based on evidence, and will be clear when the evidence is not conclusive.

**Clarifying Language: Open Science**

The WAG members noted some comments related to bias in science from Tobacco Industry and agreed that “Even if we wanted to remove every bit of Industry influence, we couldn’t do it without leaving some by the wayside.” There was agreement on the following statement: “SRNT is dedicated to the promotion of Open Science, without bias towards any one set of science or conclusions, and ensuring the fidelity of the research.”

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**Section 2: Recommended Guiding Principles and Boundary Standards, Final**

**Guiding Principle 1: What We Are**

SRNT is a scientific society whose mission is to stimulate the generation and dissemination of new knowledge concerning nicotine and tobacco in all its manifestations, from cellular to societal, across research disciplines, with the ultimate goal of reducing the harms of tobacco and nicotine-containing products around the globe.

SRNT is the professional society for those working on tobacco and nicotine scientific questions in pre-clinical, clinical, public health, epidemiological, and policy/ regulatory research domains.

SRNT is dedicated to the field, and to supporting and developing the careers of researchers in every discipline.

SRNT welcomes as members those working in adjacent communities (tobacco control, cessation, etc.) who are interested in the latest, cutting edge research on nicotine and tobacco.

**Boundary Standard 1A: SRNT is an International Organization**

Despite a large majority of members from North America, SRNT is a truly international organization as evidenced by:

- an international membership with more than 40 countries represented;
- international representation on the Board of Directors, the Journal leadership team, the SRNT
University leadership team, and throughout Network leadership; and
- welcoming international participation in all volunteer activities and sponsored programs.

**Boundary Standard 1B: Organizational Priorities**
SRNT’s primary responsibilities are to (in order of priority):
- SRNT members
- The broader scientific society (including non-member researchers)
- “Adjacent Communities” (including, but not limited to, the tobacco control, treatment, community intervention, harm reduction, and policy/regulatory/advocacy communities)
- The general public

**Boundary Standard 1C: Focus on Nicotine/Tobacco**
SRNT’s research focus will remain nicotine and tobacco. While a minority of respondents (34 percent) support the idea of SRNT expanding its mission/purpose to include research on cannabis because of areas of commonality between nicotine/tobacco and cannabis research, adding cannabis as a new focus would represent “mission creep” and dilute the focus of a Conference and Journal that are increasingly rejecting quality research. SRNT should consider cannabis researchers to be an Adjacent Community and work with them according to the concepts outlined in the Edge Zone white paper.

**Boundary Standard 1D: How Decisions Are Made**
SRNT makes decisions about Society activities based on the fit with the mission and the sustainability of programs; what is realistic, useful and sustainable (financially and otherwise); and provides a clear benefit to membership or organizational goals. Elected and appointed officials will set aside personal or work-related bias when considering issues of importance to the broader, diverse membership of SRNT.

**Rationale**
The overwhelming response from the membership via the Membership Survey was for SRNT to retain its unique role as a scientific society first and foremost, including a top priority to be a voice for the scientific community.

**Guiding Principle 2: SRNT’s Unique Role**
As a scientific society, SRNT has a unique role, a unique identity and purpose, and a unique agenda within the broader public health/tobacco control community. The role of a scientific society is not interchangeable with that of organizations operating in adjacent or “sister” communities. SRNT’s unique role is to focus on science. Please refer to the white paper, “The Edge Zone Effect,” which articulates how SRNT interacts with adjacent communities while retaining its unique identity.

**Boundary Standard 2A: Acknowledging Boundaries between SRNT and Adjacent Communities**
While members of SRNT work within adjacent communities and ally organizations, the scientific community—as represented by SRNT—is not interchangeable with those groups, nor does SRNT automatically share their respective identities, agendas, and goals (as articulated in Boundary Standard 2C). However, SRNT may support the work of, or partner with, adjacent communities in support of their goals and agendas.
Specifically, SRNT may work closely with, but is distinct from:

- the treatment/medical/cessation community
- the tobacco control/advocacy community
- the harm reduction community
- regional community-intervention communities
- the regulatory/public policy community

**Boundary Standard 2B: Partnering with Adjacent Communities**

When interacting with or responding to requests from adjacent communities, SRNT will stay true to its role as a scientific society, providing information to help inform policy, implementation, or other activities.

Adjacent communities need to be proactive in communicating needs or requests for support to SRNT; SRNT may not know of issues/concerns if those are not communicated.

SRNT will partner with adjacent communities on projects of mutual interest and benefit that foster creative thinking, problem solving, and solutions; setting boundaries that emphasize each group’s unique contribution.

**Boundary Standard 2C: Taking the Lead on Activities Beyond the Research Community**

Practical application of the evidence on behalf of adjacent communities is beyond the scope of SRNT’s mission; SRNT may initiate but does not carry out activities without the express interest and participation of adjacent communities.

**Boundary Standard 2D: What SRNT Is Not**

In line with Boundary Standard 2A, SRNT is not, nor does it act in the capacity of:

- an NGO
- a funder of research
- a regulator
- an advocate for its adjacent communities
- an advocate for the general public
- a treatment organization
- a tobacco control organization
- a harm reduction organization
- a public health organization

This does not represent an exhaustive list but rather a list of examples of adjacent communities with complementary roles to that of SRNT as a scientific society. Similar to Boundary Standard 2A, SRNT may work closely with, but is distinct from, the above noted communities.

**Rationale**

*The Membership Survey results and deliberations of the Work Advisory Group made clear that SRNT’s unique role is presenting rigorous science that enables people to make a judgment about*
how they view and use the science. “No group does what SRNT does in presenting science on nicotine and tobacco; this is a unique position that SRNT needs to keep.”

**Guiding Principle 3: An Open and Scientific Forum**
SRNT is a convener, bringing together researchers from multiple countries, from diverse backgrounds, across multiple disciplines, who represent a diversity of viewpoints on issues of concern to the nicotine and tobacco research community.

**Boundary Standard 3A: Peer Review**
SRNT does not disqualify science based on its funding source. SRNT provides the structures by which Conference abstracts and Journal papers are subjected to rigorous peer review prior to presentation, publication, or dissemination. SRNT does not endorse any research presented via any of its forums, nor does the peer review process validate or refute reported scientific findings.

**Boundary Standard 3B: Transparency**
In all appropriate venues and programs, SRNT will enforce rules on transparency of funding sources and conflicts of interest.

**Rationale**
The SRNT 2025 process (Leadership Interviews, the Membership Survey, and the deliberations of the Work Advisory Groups) has clearly identified SRNT’s role as a convener of scientific experts to bring the best scientific evidence. SRNT provides a platform for peer-reviewed science—not an endorsement of findings—and provides the audience the opportunity to have an exchange of ideas. Specifically noted: “SRNT is a unique society that enables a multi-disciplinary platform for scientific discussions to occur. At [its] core is [the] value of primacy of scientific rigor.”

**Guiding Principle 4: SRNT is Dedicated to Open Science without Bias**
SRNT supports, without bias, the generation, dissemination, and facilitates debate of rigorous science to address challenging public health questions regardless of the direction the evidence leads. SRNT is dedicated to presenting balanced views on unresolved scientific issues and makes every effort not to take positions that support one view over another, thus promoting scientific dialogue and empowering members to make their own informed decisions. Regarding communication beyond the membership, SRNT will follow the evidence, disseminate balanced information based on evidence, and will be clear when the evidence is not conclusive.

**Boundary Standard 4A: Convening Experts Versus Endorsing Positions**
SRNT does not endorse the science presented at the Conference or in the Journal, but ensures excellent science is presented through the peer review process. SRNT’s role is not to form opinions that are politically charged, but to convene experts to bring the best evidence and discuss the process in a respectful, scientifically-informed manner.

**Boundary Standard 4B: SRNT Members Taking Positions**
SRNT’s non-bias on contentious issues does not prevent individual members of SRNT from taking positions on issues that are important to them. However, SRNT members may not make statements on behalf of, or as representatives of, SRNT without express permission from the Board of Directors.
**Rationale**  
The deliberations of the Work Advisory Groups based on the Membership Survey and Leadership Reports concluded that SRNT’s role is not to form opinions that are politically charged, but to provide the venues for the best evidence to be presented without being partisan or taking positions.

**Guiding Principle 5: Advocacy**  
SRNT is the voice of the scientific community and may advocate for the science by providing evidence to educate decision makers or joining with advocacy organizations on positions that are consistent with the evidence base. SRNT does not engage in lobbying local or national legislators on specific bills/legislation, nor does it direct SRNT members to lobby legislators.

**Boundary Standard 5A: Advocacy, Allies, and the Field**  
SRNT may support the advocacy efforts of adjacent communities, as well as anti-tobacco lobbying organizations, by representing the evidence related to specific questions. SRNT will, as necessary, advocate on behalf of the nicotine and tobacco scientific community for science funding in general, and for recognition of the important role science plays in any discussions of policy, regulation, or legislation.

**Boundary Standard 5B: Taking Public Positions**  
On a case-by-case basis, SRNT will consider endorsing or supporting already accepted and/or non-controversial evidence-based guidelines, or declare a position on an issue based on clear, verifiable science that SRNT can disseminate on behalf of its membership. Otherwise, SRNT acts as an independent facilitator of scientific debates rather than the standard bearer of a particular issue other than research itself.

**Boundary Standard 5C: Stating the Facts**  
Upon request, SRNT may share pertinent evidence with groups or decision-making bodies. If the science is strong and conclusively answers a specific question, SRNT may state “this is what the evidence suggests” without further opinion or position. If the science is inconclusive, SRNT may state “this is what we know and this is what we don’t know, based on the evidence” or “the evidence supports both Position A and Position B.”

**Rationale**  
The deliberations of the Work Advisory Group based on Membership Survey results determined that SRNT’s role is not to make policy statements, but to report on the scientific evidence. If the science is strong enough, SRNT will say “this is what we know” without further opinion on the evidence presented.

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**Section 3: Phase II and Implementation of SRNT 2025**

**Next Steps**

1. Strengthen and identify new methods for supporting the career development of early career researchers.

2. Identify opportunities for SRNT to expand its footprint with other organizations (symposia with multiple disciplines) to strengthen transdisciplinarity in the Society.
3. Develop a transparent approach to, and communication about, advocacy in order to increase understanding about what SRNT supports and advocates for on behalf of its members.

4. Create and implement a communications plan to adjacent communities to promote SRNT’s voice and reputation, and communicate SRNT Guiding Principles and Boundary Standards.

Section 4: Final Recommendations

Recommendations to the Board

Recommendation 1:
With changes noted as a result of Meeting 3, the Purpose & Role Work Advisory Group recommends adoption of the Purpose & Role Guiding Principles and Boundary Standards as written.

Recommendation 2:
The Purpose & Role WAG recommends adoption of the tasks cited for the Implementation Phase.