News from the Forwards Taskforce

by Heather Turner

Abstract 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 2025.

1 Accessibility

Work continued on the R Consortium funded project to facilitate adding alternative text (*alt text*) to figures in R Journal articles. Di Cook, Jonathan Godfrey and Heather Turner advised Maliny Po in developing two tools:

- A Shiny app for generating alt text based on a plot and the code used to generate it.
- The autoAlt package for generating alt text for Quarto or R markdown files.

Both of these are works in progress. Di worked with Jacob Voo at OceaniaR Hackathon 2025 to package up some of the scripts used by the Shiny app into the autoAlt package.

2 Community engagement

Ella Kaye was selected as a 2025 Software Sustainability Institute Fellow, supporting her work with the rainbowR community for LGBTQ+ folk who code in R. This has enabled rainbowR to become more established, with an expanded leadership team and an improved Code of Conduct. The membership has grown to over 250 members and the community have had the capacity to expand their activities to include a book club (discussing Queer Data as the first book) and an online conference which will be held 25-26 February 2026. The committee has also worked towards securing the long-term sustainability of rainbowR, including adopting a constitution and electing the leadership committee. They will hold their first Annual General Meeting to vote on these developments in January 2026.

Heather Turner and Ella Kaye attended the "Data Science for Girls" open event hosted by R-Girls at Green Oak Academy, Birmingham, UK. They wrote a post on the Forwards blog to report back on this event. Mohammed A Mohammed, a co-founder of the R-Girls initiative, has joined Forwards to help maintain the connection with this group.

Ella was also Rotating Curator on the We Are R-Ladies Bluesky account for a week in December, where she was able to promote Forwards and rainbowR, as well as share tips and resources regarding contributing to base R.

3 R Contribution/on-ramps

Forwards was once again heavily involved in activities of the R Contribution Working Group, aiming to foster a larger and more diverse community of contributors to R. 2025 saw the organization of the first bilingual French/English R Dev Day as a satellite to RencontresR 2025, as well as the first R Dev Days in Oceania. The one in Australia facilitated collaboration between online participants and people at venues in Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, while the one in New Zealand ran in two streams to facilitate collaboration between online participants and people attending in Auckland. These experiments were part of a commitment to run R Contributor events as hybrid in future, for greater inclusion. The R Dev Day at RSECon25 was another significant event, as funding was available from Heather Turner's EPSRC Research Software Engineering Fellowship (grant number: EP/V052128/1) to provide full travel support for 9 participants from the Global South, enabling them to participate in person.

Heather presented a keynote talk at LatinR 2025 on *Lowering Barriers to Contributing to R* and highlighted the contributions of *R-Ladies at R Dev Days* in a talk to the R-Ladies Melbourne chapter.

Ella Kaye facilitated a second run of the C Study Group - a cohort for Oceania was organised by Nick Tierney and Fonti Kar.

4   Conferences

Dillon Sparks finalised the report on useR! 2024 survey and joined the organising committee for useR! 2025 to support the running of this survey that helps to track demographics of participants over time, as well as inform future events. He has been working with our new members Imani Oluwafumilayo Maliti and Lois Adler-Johnson on promoting the survey and analysing the results. Another new member, Jesica Formoso, is helping to maintain the useR! infoboard that summarises key data from useR! conferences over time.

Kevin O'Brien and gwynn gebeyhu were on the advisory committee for the GhanaR 2025 conference, the second instance of this conference.

5   Teaching

The materials for the Forwards Package Development Workshop were updated and added to a new section of the Forwards website: `https://forwards.github.io/package-dev/`. They are shared under the CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.

The updated materials were used to teach the workshop online to two cohorts in June-July, the first led by Ella Kaye and Pao Corrales, the second led by Joyce Robbins, Emma Rand and Heather Turner. The workshops were promoted in collaboration with rainbowR and R-Ladies Remote, encouraging participation from underrepresented groups. Around 50 people participated in these events and we plan to re-run the workshops in 2026.

6   Social Media/Branding

The Forwards website has a fresh look, thanks to Ella Kaye. Ella also developed a Quarto revealjs extension for Forwards that is used in the updated teaching materials.

7   Membership changes

We were happy to welcome four new members in 2025: Lois Adler-Johnson, Jesica Formoso, Mohammed A Mohammed, and Imani Oluwafumilayo Maliti.

One member, Emma Rand, has stepped down from the taskforce and we thank her for her contributions over several years.

Heather Turner
University of Warwick
Coventry, United Kingdom
`https://warwick.ac.uk/heatherturner`
ORCiD: 0000-0002-1256-3375
`heather.turner@r-project.org`