

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 2023.

0.1 Accessibility

Di Cook, along with Mitchell O'Hara Wild, co-mentored Abhishek Ulayil on a Google Summer of Code (GSoC) 2023 project [converting past R Journal articles to HTML](#) continuing from work started in GSoC 2022. Further improvements were made to the R packages written for the conversion, enabling HTML versions to be created for all articles in the archive.

Di Cook, Heather Turner and Jonathan Godfrey are leading an R Consortium funded project to begin adding alt text to the figures in the converted HTML articles, to make them fully accessible.

At R Project Sprint 2023, Jonathan Godfrey collaborated with participants on a couple of accessibility issues, now incorporated [BrailleR](#). Work with Deepayan Sarkar led to improvement in the ability to extract content of graphics devices, see `summary.recordedplot()`. Work with Gabriel Becker led to a working solution to extract recent console output, see the `ShowMe()`, `SessionLog()`, and `GrabLast()` functions.

0.2 Community engagement

Kevin O'Brien, Ella Kaye and Heather Turner attended SatRdays London 2023. This was an opportunity to catch up with community organizers, including Tuli Amutenya and Emmanuel Olawale Olamijuwon, from Namibia and Eswatini R User Groups respectively, now working in UK. Ella and Heather gave a talk on [Sustainability and EDI in the R Project](#), giving an overview of their work as part of Heather's research fellowship on this topic.

[RainbowR](#), led by Ella Kaye and Hanne Oberman, have increased the frequency of their online meetups and are now meeting monthly. At the end of November, they launched a [pilot buddy scheme](#) to foster stronger connections between community members, with a plan to pair people up with buddies every three months.

Also in November, Kevin O'Brien started a monthly community call for organizers of R User Groups - upcoming meetings can be found on the [Global R User Group](#) meetup.

0.3 Conferences

Julie Josse is on the program committee for *useR!* 2024 and Forwards have been involved in suggesting people for keynotes and the organizing/program committees.

Yanina Bellini Saibene co-chaired [LatinR 2023](#) along with Natalia da Silva and Riva Quiroga. This was the first in-person LatinR since going online in 2020 and the first time R experts from outside Latin America attended as keynotes and instructors. The conference was attended by 300 people from 14 different countries and of the 82% who reported their gender, 48% identified themselves as women. Thanks to sponsor support, scholarships were awarded to 25 participants. As in previous years, content was presented in Spanish, Portuguese, and English. In future, the conference will alternate between in-person and online format.

0.4 R Contribution

Forwards members continue to play an active role in the R Contribution Working Group (RCWG).

Heather Turner and Ella Kaye, have been regular facilitators of the monthly office hours for R contributors, along with Gabriel Becker. Thanks to the R Consortium, these office hours are now advertised on the [R Contributors Meetup](#), along with other RCWG events, which has helped to sustain good attendance.

Saranjeet Kaur Bhogal continued work on the [R Development Guide](#), with funding remaining from the Google Season of Docs (GSoD) 2022. This work improved structure and content, based on reviews by the steering committee.

Several Forwards members were involved in R Project Sprint 2023 (a full report of this event was published in the R Journal Volume 15/3). One important outcome of the sprint was a new section in the R Dev Guide on [How to contribute new translations](#) using the Weblate interface, which only existed as a prototype when the translation chapter was added as part of the GSoD 2022 project.

Heather Turner, along with James Tripp, mentored Atharva Shirdhankar on a Google Summer of Code 2023 project creating the [R Dev Container](#) a GitHub Codespace providing a containerised development environment for editing and compiling the R source code. The prototype proved useful at the R Project Sprint and further development is planned to improve on the first version.

At LatinR 2023, Pao Corrales gave a lightning talk with María Nanton on contributing translations to R and they co-organized a translation space. The Spanish translation coverage increased from 40% to 42% during the event. Heather Turner gave a keynote on [Contributing to R](#) at the II Conference of R in Barcelona in November, where the audience were happy to hear that a Catalan translation has been started, with initial translations due to be added to R 4.4.0.

0.5 Social Media

Zane Daz, Ella Kaye, gwynn gebeyehu and Heather Turner gave the Forwards website a long overdue update, switching from the previous Hugo/blogdown framework to Quarto. This should be easier to maintain and we hope to add some fresh content in 2024.

0.6 Changes in Membership

Previous members

The following members have stepped down:

- Teaching team: Emily Dodwell, Ritwik Mitra
- Community team: Sam Toet
- Conferences team: Yanina Bellini Saibene (co-leader), Noa Tamir (co-leader)
- Surveys team: Andrea Sánchez-Tapia (co-leader), Claudia Huaylla
- On-ramps team: Jyoti Bhogal, Allison Vuong

We thank them for their contribution to the taskforce.

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