

2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: EVALUATION REPORT

The findings presented below result from the evaluation survey distributed following the 2020 annual general meeting (AGM) of Research Impact Canada (RIC). In total, **20 members responded to the survey**, sharing their general perspectives on the AGM along with perceived outcomes and areas for improvement in future AGMs. Respondent characteristics were as follows:

Professional positions/titles

Impact practitioner (e.g., knowledge broker)	9
Research administrator (e.g., grants support)	8
Research strategy/policy	2
Unknown	1

Previous meeting attendance by members

First meeting	8
1-3 meetings	7
4+ meetings	5

Participation type

Presenting attendee	5
Non-presenting attendee	15

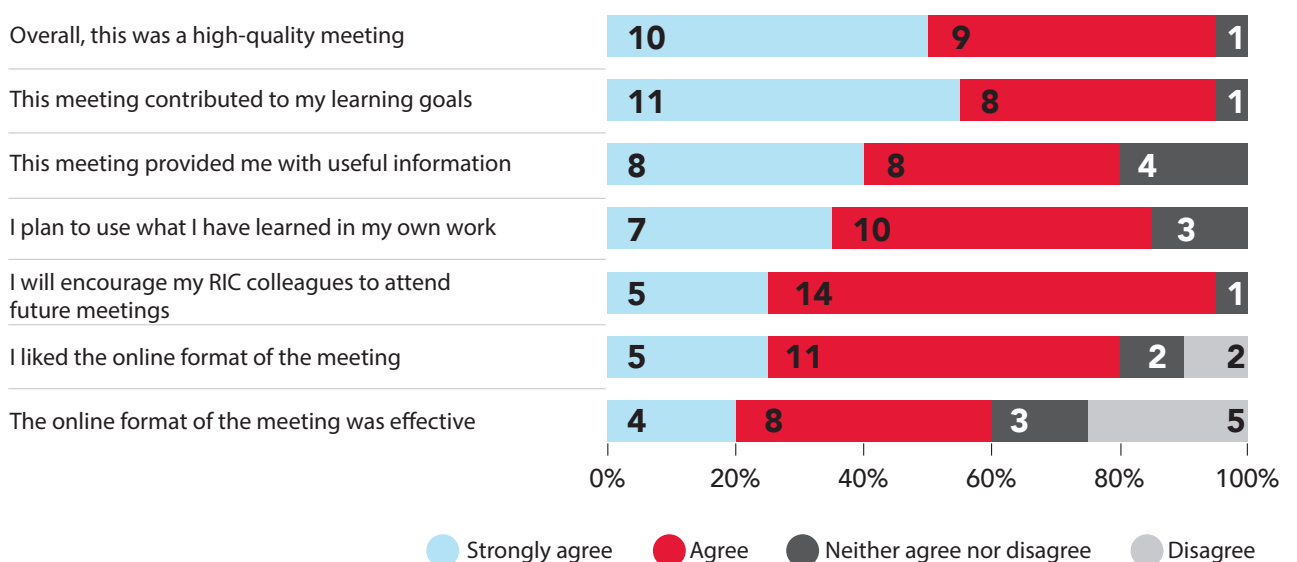
GENERAL PERSPECTIVES

There was widespread agreement that the 2020 AGM was high quality, provided useful information, and contributed to RIC members' learning goals (Figure 1). Multiple respondents spoke about how the AGM is regularly a highlight in their professional interactions related to knowledge mobilization (KMB). As one respondent put it, the AGM "energizes me and is a critical component of my annual work cycle. I learn so much and value the connections made through this network." It was noteworthy that several respondents believed this year's AGM set the bar in terms of programming and facilitation. Some of the features that contributed to this positive reception included:

- The meeting occurring over several days and with respect for different time zones;
- The breakout sessions, which provided (a) more informal interactions and relational development and (b) two opportunities to participate in a single session of interest (especially useful in light of competing obligations) or the ability to participate in multiple sessions;
- The built-in flexibility, including the frequent breaks and the freedom to join some sessions but not others, which was critical to maintaining energy and avoiding fatigue.

On the topic of bilingualism, respondents commended the efforts to encourage and facilitate engagement in both French and English. The environment established in this year's AGM was one where respondents reported they "felt like it was a safe space for folks to practice their language skills." And beyond the immediate benefits to attendees, several respondents described how they were "inspired to be more capable for next year." Although some felt there remained room for improvement, the overall sentiment was that bilingualism efforts were markedly improved over previous years.

Figure 1. General perspectives about the annual meeting.

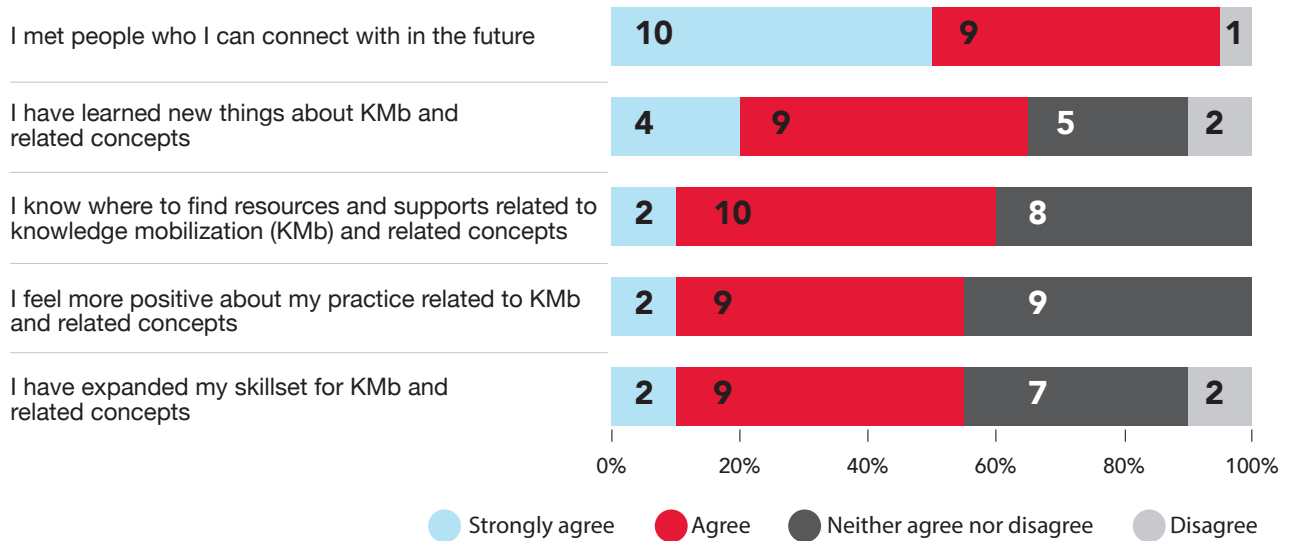


... considering the benefits and challenges together, respondents suggested it is time to “move away from an either/or approach”.

Conversely, when it came to the online format, perspectives were not so clear cut. Although comments about the AGM’s organization were predominantly positive, there were some divergent views on the effectiveness of the online format. Those who enjoyed the online format welcomed how it improved accessibility for institutional staff, created opportunities to re-envision the AGM’s focus, and responded to the environmental impacts of air travel. A key aspect to appreciating these benefits was the ease with which members could engage—for example: “having one link for the whole conference made things easy, and I really appreciated the support offered to help people find their way through.” In contrast, those who expressed some concern questioned whether the online format could support the development of strong social connections, as the in-person AGMs have in the past. Several members also found that with the online format, “you’re never fully away from the office,” which meant it was more challenging to sustain energy and engagement. However, considering the benefits and challenges together, respondents suggested it is time to “move away from an either/or approach.” Overall, RIC members felt that future AGMs would benefit from including both in-person (when safe) and online components.

PERCEIVED OUTCOMES

Similar to the 2019 AGM, respondents once again felt that the most important learning from the 2020 AGM was about each other’s KMb experiences and tools. Nearly every respondent indicated that they developed new or strengthened connections with other RIC members or learned something new about KMb. Regarding the latter, there was particular enthusiasm for the four breakout sessions: KMb success/failure stories, sharing of KMb best practices/learned experiences, review of KMb skills and tools, and discussion on committee work. Multiple respondents expressed gratitude for how these sessions spoke to their requests following last year’s AGM for more opportunities to learn about the KMb-related challenges and solutions taking shape in different RIC member institutions. The only concern expressed in this regard was that some respondents felt greater speaker diversity might have been informative—diversity in terms of member institutions (e.g., large and small, francophone and anglophone).

Figure 2. Perceived outcomes from participation in the annual meeting.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

When asked about recommendations for future AGMs, respondents offered the following:

- 1. Sharing the meeting agenda and session details sooner, enabling attendees to plan further in advance (e.g., freeing up their regular work schedule).** To be clear, respondents extolled the organizing committee's work in providing structure and guidance for the AGM. However, when encouraged to offer constructive criticism, several members noted how more advanced notice of the AGM activities would be preferable and likely enhance their ability to engage with the meeting.
- 2. RIC members craved "action items" and key messages from the breakout sessions.** Given the AGM's short time horizon (occurring over only a few days each year), respondents were interested in mechanisms to better utilize and extend momentum generated at the meeting. The two most common suggestions for advancing this idea were to (a) create a list of optional action items towards the AGM's conclusion (the focus of which to be collectively determined), and (b) ask that session leaders record key messages from their sessions to be collated and distributed.
- 3. Safeguard the informal time when RIC members can connect.** In future AGMs, whether in-person, online, or a blend of these formats, respondents urged for the informal time (such as the breaks) to become an essential component. Not only was the informal time a welcomed shift from the structured Zoom interactions that are endemic to the current university context, but it also enabled RIC members to develop more personal and varied ties with one another.