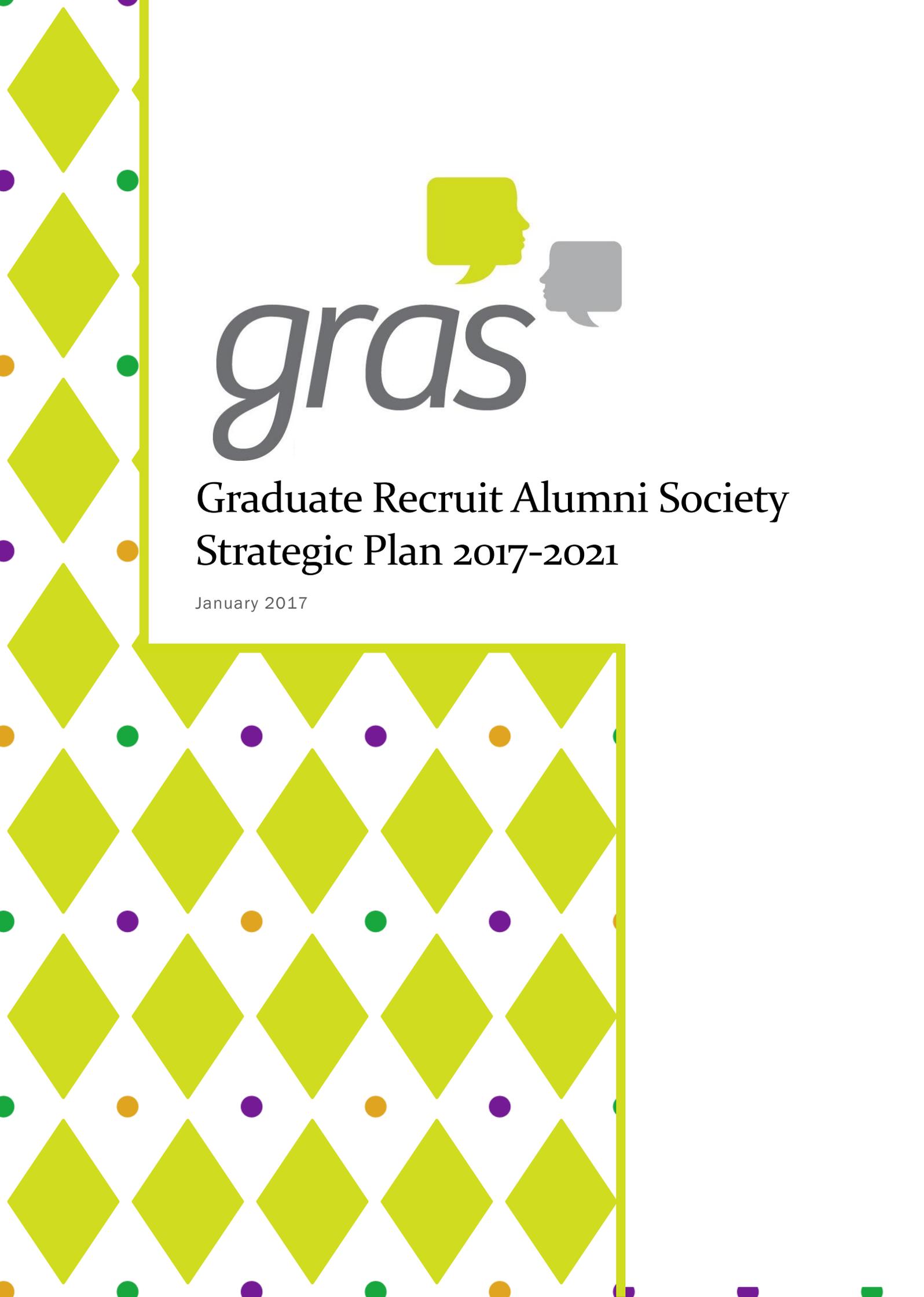




Graduate Recruit Alumni Society
Strategic Plan 2017-2021

January 2017



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Introduction

The Graduate Recruit Alumni Society (GRAS) is a non-profit members' organisation, first established in 1998. GRAS is a community organisation based in the Victorian Public Service (VPS). Our volunteer Committee work with and for our community:

“to support a stronger social and professional network within the graduate and graduate alumni society.”

In the past, GRAS has been most closely connected with its members who were in their graduate year. Since 2013, GRAS has increased its focus on providing Professional Development and social events, and news, to its alumni members. This has led to a bigger and more engaged GRAS membership than in the past.

In early 2016, GRAS was connected to over 400 members through our weekly bulletin, and had much stronger engagement with alumni than in previous years.

With this larger, more senior and more engaged membership, the GRAS Committee ran a consultation process in July 2016 to discuss what an “ideal GRAS 2021” would look like and how to achieve that. This Strategic Plan is the result of that process.

The remainder of this introduction explains the structure and consultation process that were adopted in developing this plan. The report then documents the discussions and suggestions from that consultation and establishes a set of long-term, strategic commitments to the organisational and cultural changes that will help deliver that.

The 2016 GRAS Committee recommends that future Committees continue to follow the commitments established in this Strategic Plan and “check in” against them over time – both by considering whether they’re being met and reaffirming with the GRAS community that they represent the kind of organisation we want to become.

Themes and consultation process

During July 2016, the GRAS Committee and membership met at two workshop events to discuss eight themes that will affect GRAS' future. At each workshop, GRAS' community discussed three key questions:

- Where is GRAS in 2016?
- Where do we want to be in 2021?
- How can we get there?

The first workshop was held on Wednesday, 13 July 2016. Approx. 20 people attended and discussed:

- What do GRAS' graduate members want?
- What do GRAS' alumni members want?
- Who should GRAS welcome as members?
- How should GRAS interact with other organisations?

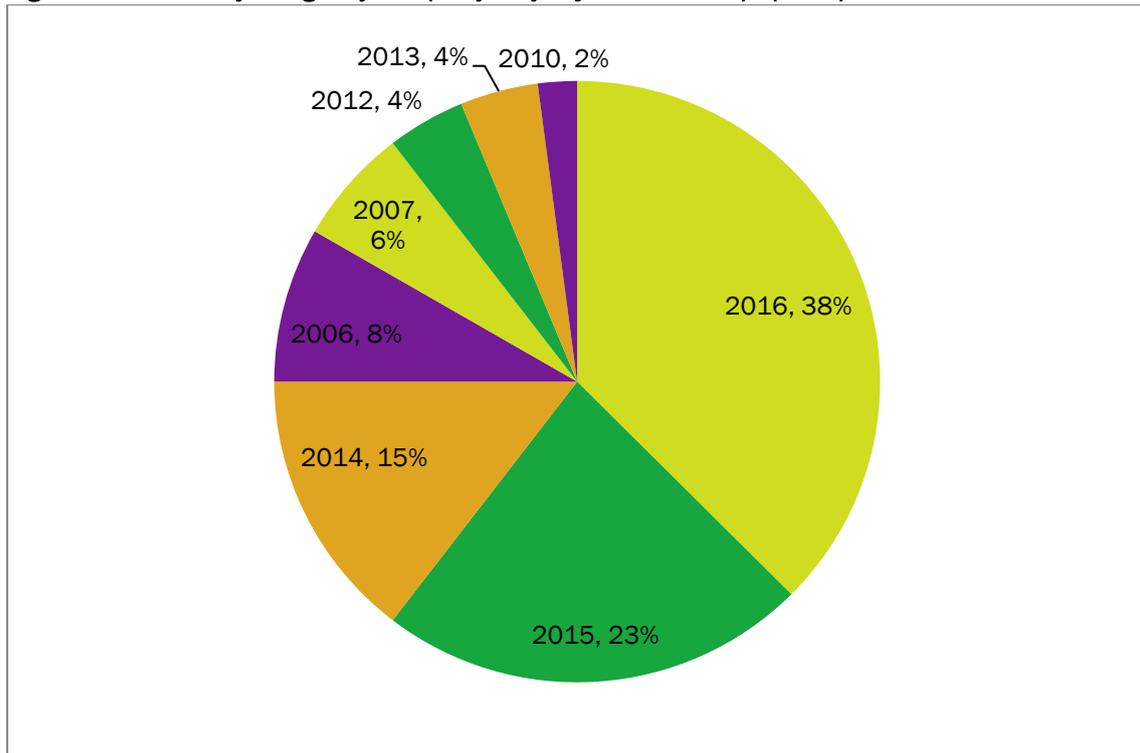
The second workshop was held on Friday, 29 July 2016. Approx. 10 people attended and discussed:

- How can GRAS help its members support one-another?
- How should the GRAS Committee Operate?
- How should GRAS communicate?
- How should GRAS manage its finances?

GRAS also hosted an online survey between Thursday, 14 July 2016 and Friday, 5 August 2016, to collect information from people who couldn't attend the workshops, or had something extra to say. This included multiple-choice questions for respondents to give quick input into each theme, as well as free-text questions where respondents could provide a richer comment of what they thought an "ideal GRAS 2021" should look like and how to get there.

50 people responded to the online survey. Of those 50, 48 (96%) indicated their "grad year" (the year they joined the VPS). This included 18 (38%) current graduates, 18 alumni from 2014-2015 and 12 (25%) more senior alumni.

Figure 1: When was your "grad year" (the year you joined the VPS)? (n=48)



Consultation on draft report

In late 2016, a consultation draft version of this report was published in GRAS' Weekly Bulletin and in the GRAS Community Facebook Group. The Committee invited comments throughout December 2016 about how the draft could more accurately reflect their views and whether its commitments would lead to the kind of organisation they wanted.

Generally, the comments received were supportive of the draft but asked for more clarity about what parts of the report represented the Committee's commitments. Following those comments, the GRAS Committee made minor changes to the Strategic Plan which are reflected in this final version.

The key changes to this plan since the consultation draft version are:

- Slight clarifications to the introduction at page 2, above.
- An acknowledgement of the diverse needs across GRAS' community, and a commitment to being inclusive of these under "What do GRAS' graduate members want?" at page 6, below.
- The addition of Appendix 1 at Page 23 below, to consolidate GRAS' commitments under this Strategic Plan in a single place.

What do GRAS' graduate members want?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

GRAS is already well-connected with its graduate members, providing a range of services including:

- A range of Professional Development (PD) opportunities, including “in-house” seminars and events delivered directly by GRAS.
- Social events, including welcome/networking events and the annual GRAS ball.
- Sporting events including lunchtime netball.
- News about PD and social events coordinated by other groups across the VPS.
- Opportunities to quickly build a VPS network through engaging with these events and the other graduates and alumni who attend them.

Where do we want to be in 2021?

In our first workshop on 13 July, attendees discussed these events and opportunities, the way they're delivered to graduates and how they can be a useful add-on to the PD offerings provided by the VPSC.

Early engagement and support in establishing a network – amongst graduates but also with alumni and other VPS officers – was very important. Building strong personal networks at the start of the graduate year can provide support and development opportunities during a challenging year.

Participants at our workshop were interested for GRAS to help them network and connect with alumni – people who've experienced a graduate program and can provide advice and guidance during their graduate year. This idea is discussed later under the “How can GRAS help its members support one-another?”.

Attendees at the workshop also suggested specific ideas and topics across PD and social events, including ski trips, sports days, and diversity-focused events. For example, a “GRAS debate” event could be paired with a short discussion of a topical legal issue and provide practical experience for participants. Networking events like a “speed-mentoring” or “collect the most business cards” night could also be useful.

Some of these have been or are focus areas already, but this highlighted the need for GRAS' Committee to stay connected to our membership and continually listen for suggestions and support.

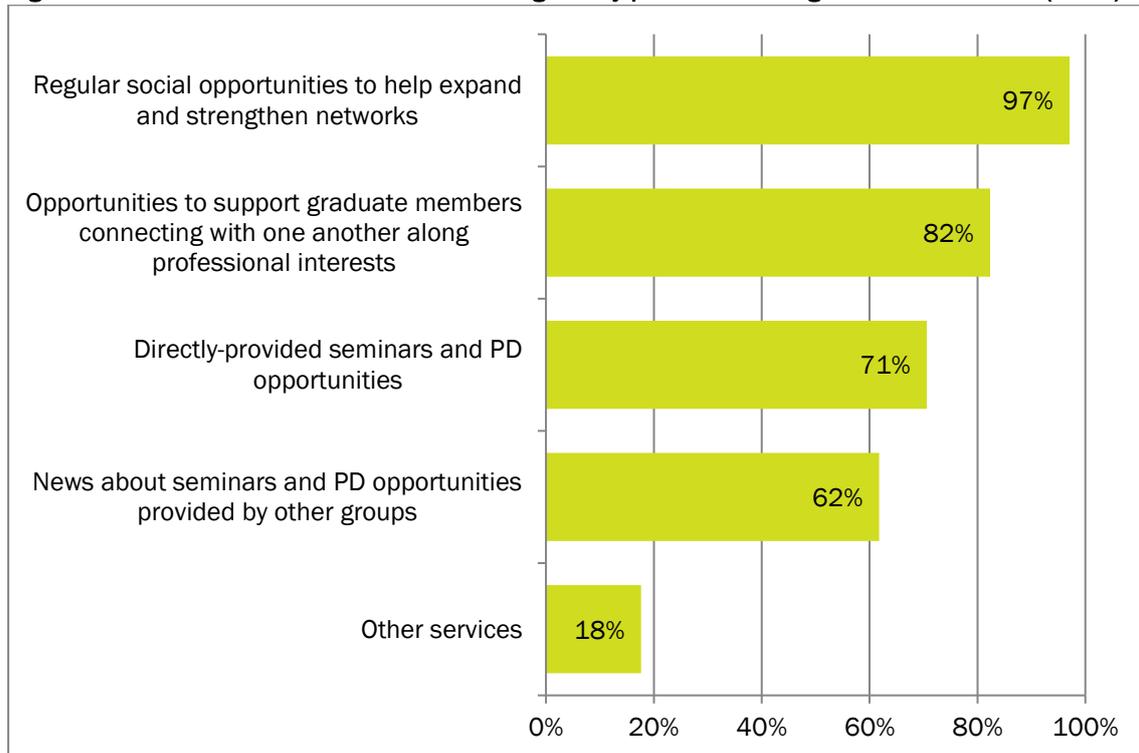
This was consistent with the results from our survey. Many of these areas were important to our respondents, particularly social (33/34, 97%) and professional networking (23/34, 82%). Some respondents also commented that an “ideal GRAS” would:

“... have a community feel where graduates and alums would share information via official and unofficial channels as to the numerous opportunities across the public sector...”

“[Provide] the chance to attend many PD events that would otherwise not be available to them through the grad program alone.”

In response to the consultation draft version of this plan, some members commented that GRAS should be clearly committed towards including all graduates and alumni in our events. Inclusion has been a focus area for GRAS in 2016 – our Diversity and Inclusion Officer advised the Committee on these issues and provided useful news items to share with the GRAS community. Future Committees should continue to consider the range of needs across the GRAS community, and always be inclusive when planning our events.

Figure 2: What should GRAS focus on delivering as key priorities for its graduate members? (n=34)



Our commitment:

Between 2017 and 2021, the GRAS Committee will build on its existing graduate offerings across the social, PD and news areas.

We will listen continuously for suggestions and feedback, adapting our approach and plans in response to our members’ interests. The events we plan will be inclusive to and consider the range of needs in our community.

We will also continue to support opportunities for our graduate members to network and build connections more broadly and quickly, by:

- Working with the VPSC and through informal networks to connect to incoming cohorts as early as possible
- Continuing our engagement with smaller, content-focused groups like the new GRAS Legal Network.
- Finding opportunities to connect our graduate and alumni members, especially where this could lead to peer-mentoring opportunities.

What do GRAS' alumni members want?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

Since 2013, GRAS has been expanding its alumni engagement, seeing more members remain more connected over time. GRAS established a Vice President, Alumni in 2013, and an Alumni Subcommittee in 2014. These teams have helped us start to deliver:

- Social events like alumni dinners and Monthly Alumni Drinks
- News through the Quarterly Alumni Newsletter
- Targeted PD events, like 2015's "Where are they Now" event
- One-off "reunion-style" networking events for specific VPS GRADS cohorts

While some of them are becoming regular events many of these are “one-off” and GRAS still has a limited understanding of what’s useful or not to its alumni members. The GRAS Committee was particularly interested to hear from this newly-engaged group about their suggestions on where to focus over the next five years.

Where do we want to be in 2021?

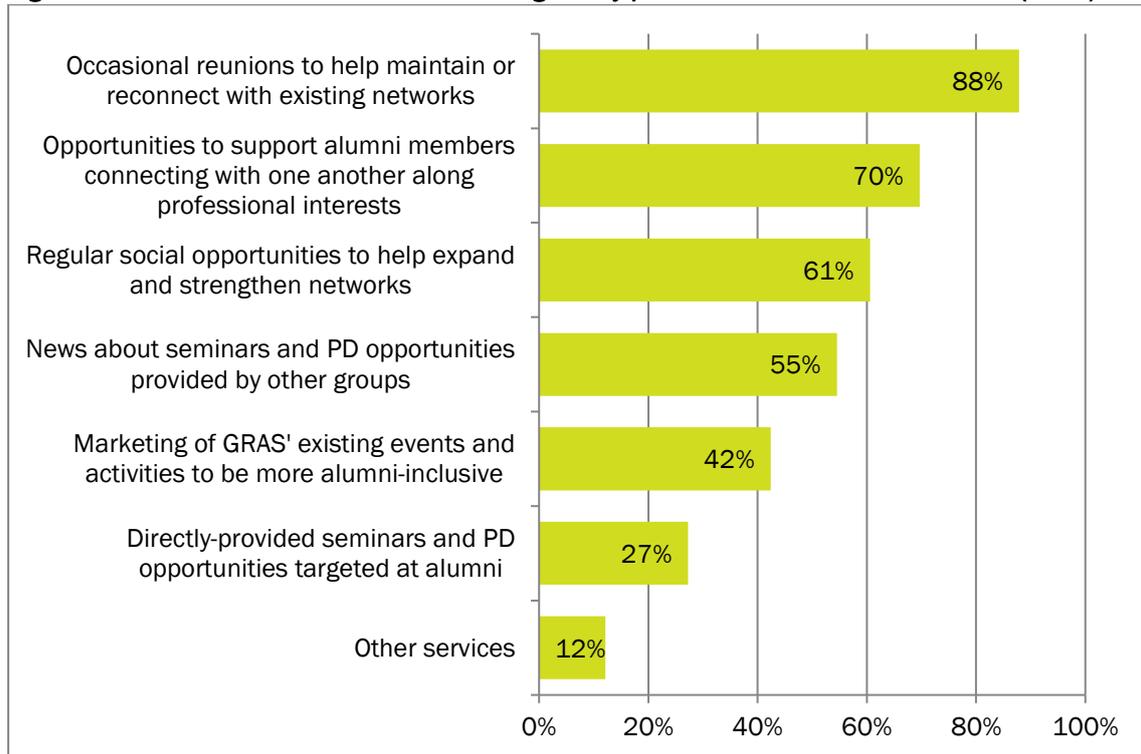
The alumni members at our workshop were most interested in a “GRAS 2021” that supported networking, both professionally and socially. The top-three areas that survey respondents indicated should be a priority were all focused on networking, especially reunion events to help maintain or reconnect with existing networks (29/33, 88%).

GRAS has supported some reunion-style events over in recent years, including the 30-year anniversary of the GRADS in 2013 and a reunion dinner for the 2005 GRADS cohort in 2015. As GRAS’ connection to past cohorts from the GRADS and other programs grows, we will need to jointly deliver those events with those groups.

The discussion in our workshop also focused on the idea of more of GRAS’ activities being “alumni-inclusive”. This was not as high a priority in our survey results when compared to networking-style events, but one respondent said:

“An ideal GRAS for me will have its alumni members at the core of the events and news it manages. “Alum events” will not be a special subset of GRAS events...”

We also discussed the idea of collecting and sharing information more effectively – perhaps through a database or website – to help our alumni members reconnect to one another more easily. While this could be labour and resource-intensive to build and maintain, similar ideas were raised in our discussions about “How should GRAS help its members support one-another?” and “How should GRAS communicate?”. The idea is worth investigating further in discussion with our members and Committee, to understand more about what this would look like and how GRAS could achieve it.

Figure 3: What should GRAS focus on delivering as key priorities for its alumni members? (n=33)**Our commitment:**

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to expand its focus on alumni members by listening and responding to their inputs, and developing events and opportunities together with them.

Our existing events will be designed and communicated differently, to become more “alumni-inclusive”.

We will also investigate new ways to collect and share information about the GRAS community to support stronger alumni networks.

Who should GRAS welcome as members?

Where in GRAS in 2016?

GRAS is closely-linked with the VPS Graduate Recruitment and Development Scheme (GRADS). At the start of 2016, GRAS' active membership and Committee were made entirely of VPS GRADS graduates and alumni.

Acknowledging the similar interests and needs of graduates and alumni from a range of VPS induction programs, and that a broader community can gather and share more useful information for its members, GRAS has investigated in 2015 and 2016 how it might reach out to and connect with other groups.

In 2015 and 2016, the GRAS Committee started engaging with some of these groups and encouraging them to participate. In mid-2016, GRAS welcomed its first members from the DELWP/DEDJTR Science Graduate Program.

Where do we want to be in 2021?

At the first workshop session on 13 July, attendees supported the idea of a more open GRAS that supports and engages with these other groups. They suggested GRAS should be more open – especially around its free events – so it could reach a broader community and help them connect with one-another.

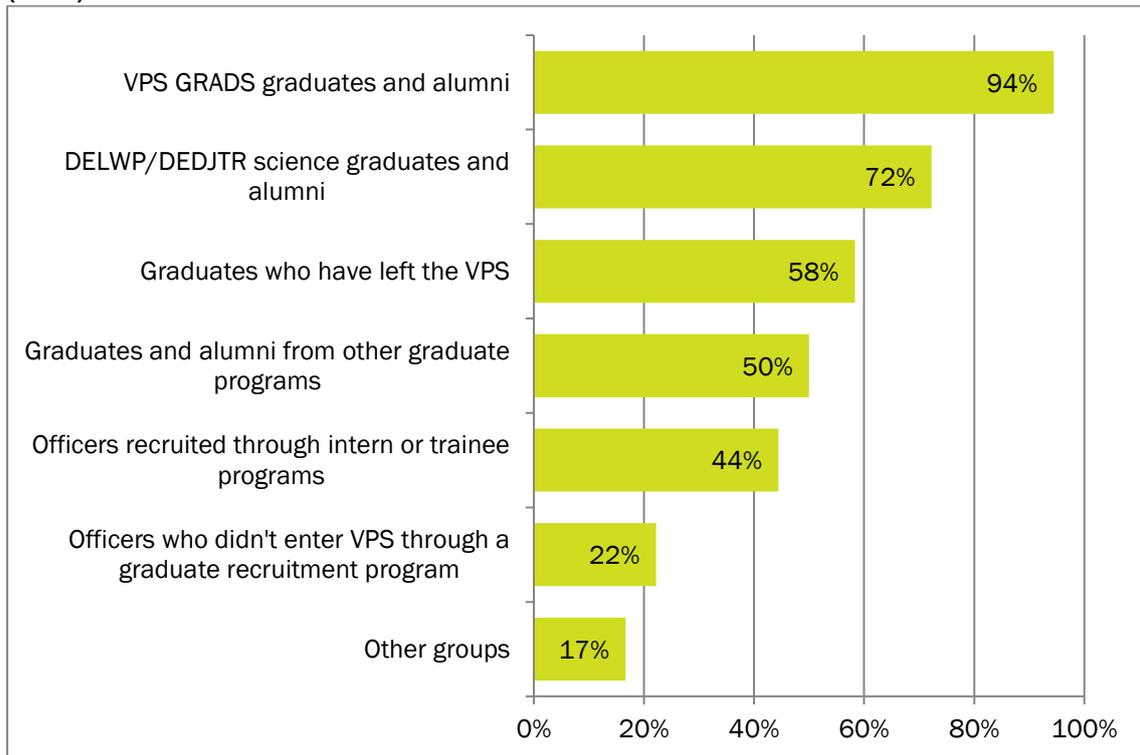
There was similar support for an expanded membership through our online survey. Our respondents suggested engaging with and focusing on grads and alums from the DELWP/DEDJTR Science Graduates Program (26/36, 72%), graduates who have left the VPS (21/36, 58%), and grads and alums from other programs (18/36, 50%). Some respondents said:

“... [An ideal] GRAS will cater to grads and alums from the range of grad and trainee programs across VPS...”

“... GRAS should facilitate connections across the VPS with many of the different graduate cohorts to maximise shared networking opportunities.”

GRAS' existing membership and connection to the VPS GRADS shouldn't be ignored. Most of our current members entered the VPS through the GRADS, and almost all survey respondents (34/36, 94%) said this should remain a key focus area.

Figure 4: Which are the key groups that GRAS should welcome as members and focus on supporting? (n=36)



Our commitment:

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to reach out to a broader range of VPS graduate and alumni cohorts, particularly including those from the DELWP/DEDJTR Science Graduate Program.

We will investigate and establish new ways to maintain our alumni members' connections to our community after they leave the VPS.

We will continue to pay close attention to our existing membership during this transition, especially including VPS GRADS graduates and alumni.

How should GRAS interact with other organisations?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

VPS staff are well-supported by several networking and professional organisations, including:

Internal, government-based training and networking groups:

- Aboriginal Pathways Program
- Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC)
- Victorian Public Sector Commission – especially through their management of the VPS GRADS

Other groups or organisations:

- DELWP/DEDJTR Young Professionals Network (YPN)
- DPC 3&4 Network
- Economic Society of Australia (ESA) and its Young Professionals Network (ESA YPN)
- Enablers Network
- Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) and its Young Professionals Network (YIPAA)
- Victorian Public Sector Continuous Improvement and Innovation Network (VPSCIIN)
- VPS Pride Network

GRAS' relationships with these organisations range from formal partnerships (we're currently finalising a Memorandum of Understanding with the Graduate Advisory Committee) to loose information sharing (our Committee-members meet informally with representatives of the VPS Pride Network and ESA YPN to learn about upcoming events and share news with GRAS members).

Where do we want to be in 2021?

At our first workshop, attendees discussed the range of organisations and groups GRAS is connected to, and that they a key part of many of our VPS networks.

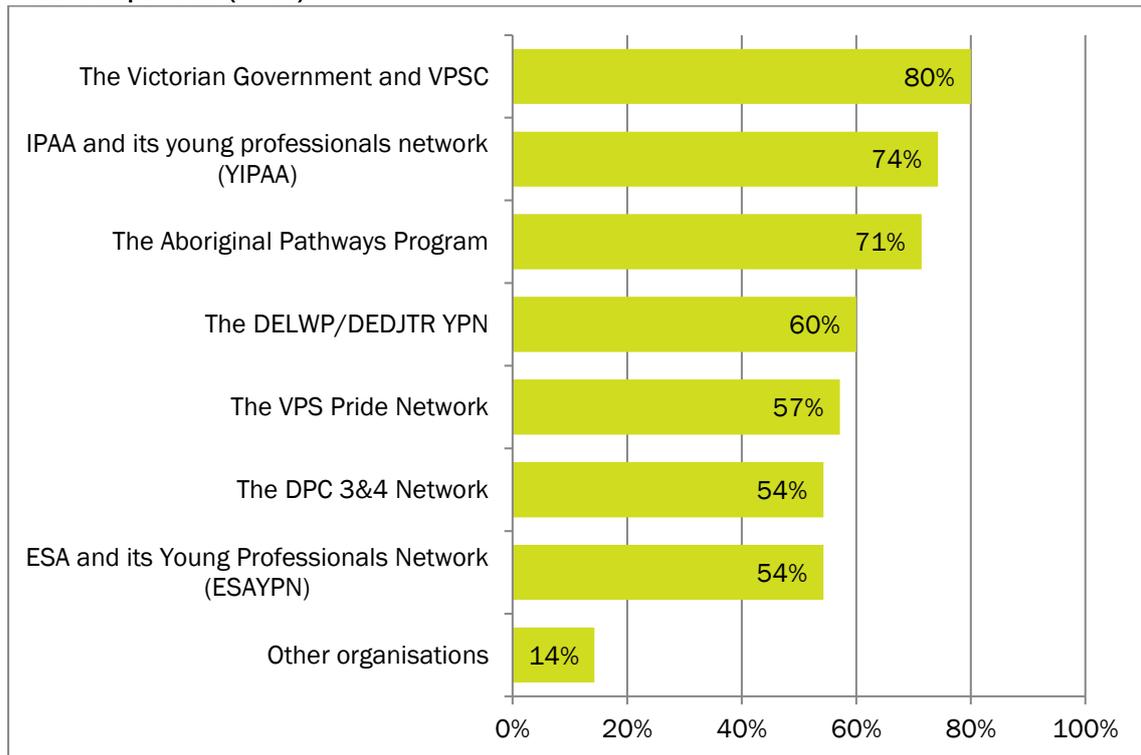
We noted key groups GRAS should focus on building and maintaining its relationships with to better serve its members, including the VPSC and the range of coordinators/managers involved in both the VPS GRADS and Aboriginal Pathways Program.

Attendees also discussed the DELWP/DEDJTR YPN – a group focused on professional networking and training for young officers at DELWP and DEDJTR. In response to our online survey, members responded that the same groups were important, as well as IPAA (26/35, 74%), the VPS Pride Network (20/35, 57%) and others.

We discussed that a combination of formal and informal approaches would be the most useful in improving our connections with these groups. While processes memoranda are important for larger groups or more complex projects, an informal commitment to semi-regular coffees might be all that other relationships need.

Where personal relationships are involved in GRAS' connection to other organisations, "relationship succession planning" will be important. Junior Committee members should be welcomed to drive GRAS' relationship-building and supported to establish their own personal connections where more senior members are already active. This should help make GRAS' relationships more long-lasting and robust to Committee turnover.

Figure 5: Which are the key organisations GRAS should focus on building and maintaining relationships with? (n=35)



Our commitment:

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to build on its connections with other organisations across and outside of the VPS, to help us better understand, generate and share opportunities with our members.

We will use a combination of formal and informal approaches, depending on what works best for each organisation we work with.

We will include more junior Committee members in these discussions, using their skills to support the GRAS community and helping our relationships last longer into the future.

How can GRAS help its members support one-another?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

GRAS' membership in 2016 engage and support one-another through a range of means already, but this is generally without formal coordination or direct involvement from GRAS. For example, members will often share news about a job opportunity with one another, or offer to meet and discuss issues with a current grad.

As GRAS' membership grows and includes more senior officers than in the past, this can facilitate more opportunities to connect and share news and opportunities, and engage in peer-learning.

Where do we want to be in 2021?

At our second workshop on 27 July, attendees discussed using GRAS to improve or amplify our community's efforts to engage with and support one another. Respondents to our survey were particularly interested in this idea, noting:

"Helping members support one another should be at the core of GRAS' efforts..."

"GRAS should be built and driven by its members, both alumni and graduate. This includes identifying what members want from the society, and how best to provide that. This doesn't have to be expensive or time intensive, but should utilize the efforts of more volunteers and member involvement to achieve..."

While GRAS has a strong record of looking for and sharing social and training opportunities, including those managed by our members, we discussed at the workshop that there is only "so much space" for these to be shared in a weekly bulletin.

Some ways to help more information be shared could involve clearer encouragement to share through our existing platforms like the GRAS Community Facebook Group, and investigation into new platforms (possibly including a GRAS website or additional regular communications). These opportunities deserve further investigation.

Respondents to our survey were interested in finding new job opportunities through GRAS (17/28, 61%). Members often share opportunities either directly with their colleagues or in the GRAS Community Facebook Group, and in 2016 some departments approached the GRAS Committee asking for support in advertising employment opportunities through the GRAS Bulletin. Again, clarity and encouragement about what kind of information is welcome on GRAS' platforms, combined with further support to share appropriate content, is needed.

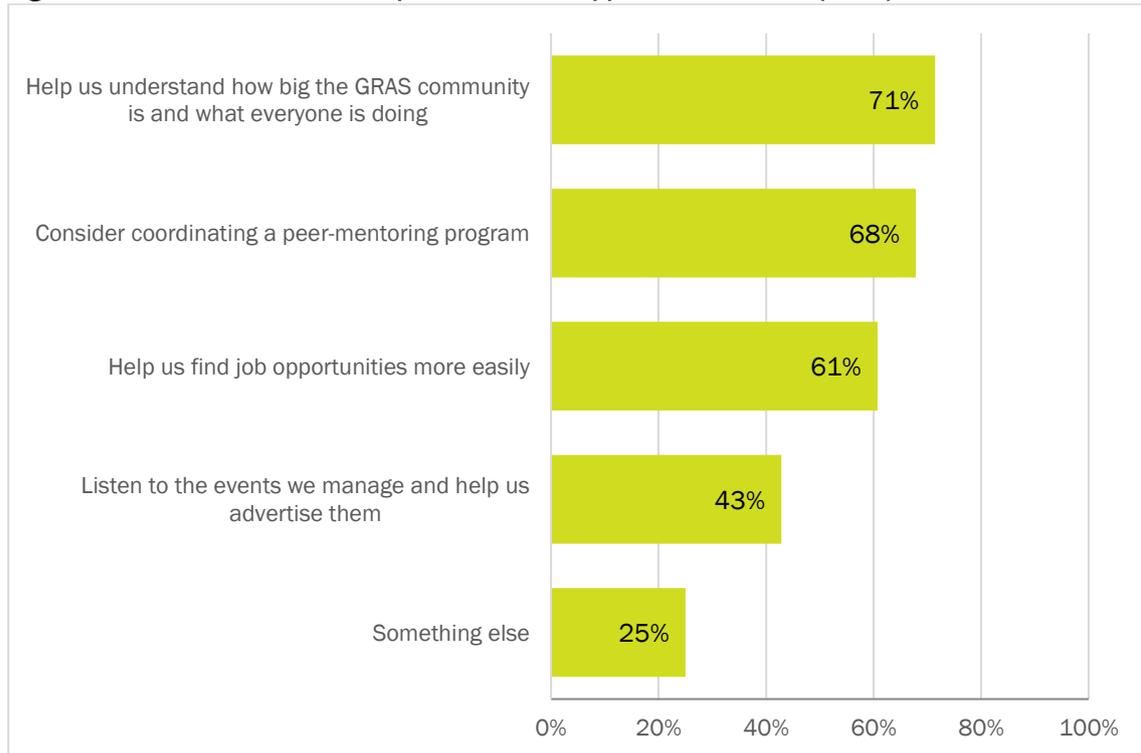
Connecting junior and more senior members together to facilitate a buddy or peer-mentoring function was raised at our workshop. GRAS' previous attempts at this have been unsuccessful, due to limited engagement from members outside of their graduate year. It is worth considering again with a more engaged alumni community – especially as our graduate members raised it at both workshop events.

Peer-mentoring could be an effective way to help new GRAS members establish themselves and connect to colleagues and support networks quickly, especially for new graduates from diverse backgrounds. Survey respondents also supported this idea (19/28, 68%) and suggested:

“A mentoring program is a great idea, and ideas on implementation should start to be formulated.”

“...I'd also like junior GRAS members with an interest in a particular career path be able to connect with and get advice form senior members working in that area...”

Figure 6: What can GRAS do to help its members support one another? (n=28)



Our commitment:

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will investigate ways to help our community connect and engage with one another more effectively.

We will investigate what GRAS can contribute to the peer-mentoring space, beginning with launching a small “coffee roulette” in this GRAS Committee’s term.

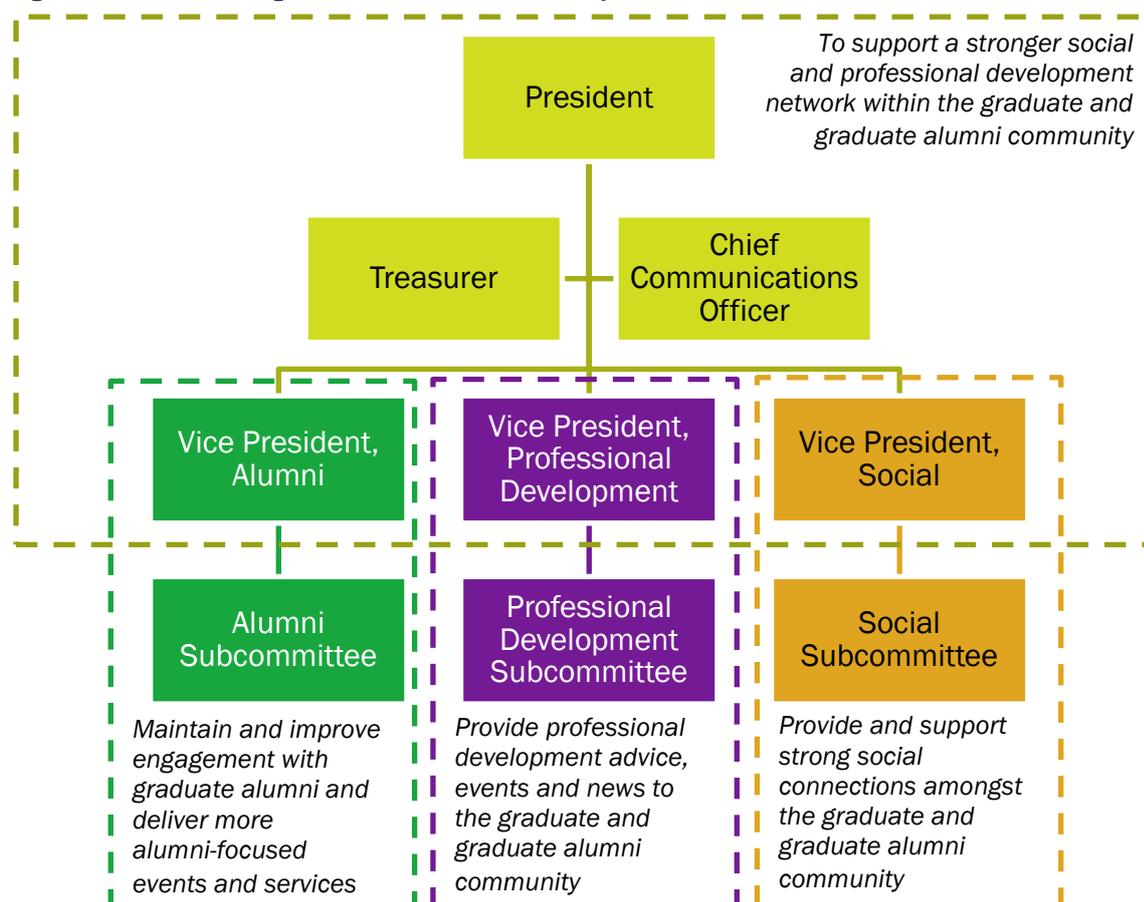
We will continue to investigate ways to support members to share news, events and opportunities with one-another, and provide support and encouragement to our community about how to do this.

How should the GRAS Committee Operate?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

The GRAS Committee 2016 consists of 22 volunteers, organised around a Vision and three Goals that were formalised in 2015 in our *Committee Structure and Appointment Process*. GRAS' core structure and objectives are outlined in Figure 7, below.

Figure 7: GRAS' core organisational structure and objectives



Additional office-bearers are appointed to support this core structure. For example, the 2016 GRAS Committee appointed:

- A Communications Officer and Finance Officer to support the Executive Team and assist in preparing communications and financial guidelines.
- A Diversity and Inclusion Officer to encourage an inclusive approach to GRAS' communications and events.
- A Sports Officer to manage the Social Subcommittee's sporting events.

The GRAS Executive Team and GRAS Committee meet monthly to coordinate GRAS' activities. In between those meetings, Committee members work with GRAS' membership and amongst their Subcommittees towards specific projects or tasks.

Later this year, GRAS will begin work on finalising a Charter to formalise the more detailed processes and arrangements sitting under this structure. It's important for this to reflect our membership's wants and to facilitate good governance and the achievement of all our strategic objectives.

Where do we want to be in 2021?

Amongst our survey respondents, the most important areas for the charter to consider were solidifying the commitment to listen and respond to members (23/28, 82%) and expanding our members' involvement and ownership (19/28, 68%). Although the GRAS Committee is committed to these ideas, the way we achieve them is unclear in our community.

We also discussed that although GRAS' organisational structure and goals are understood within the GRAS Committee, they're not as clear within our membership. This can also contribute to confusion about how to approach the Committee. 54% (15/28) of the respondents to our survey indicated the new charter should focus on clarifying reporting-lines and decision-making authority, and one respondent suggested:

Without clear arrangements and regular reminders – especially with a membership that can change year-to-year – it can be difficult for people to understand when and how to engage with GRAS. The Committee needs to be clearer about these processes and solidify them through the charter or other guides.

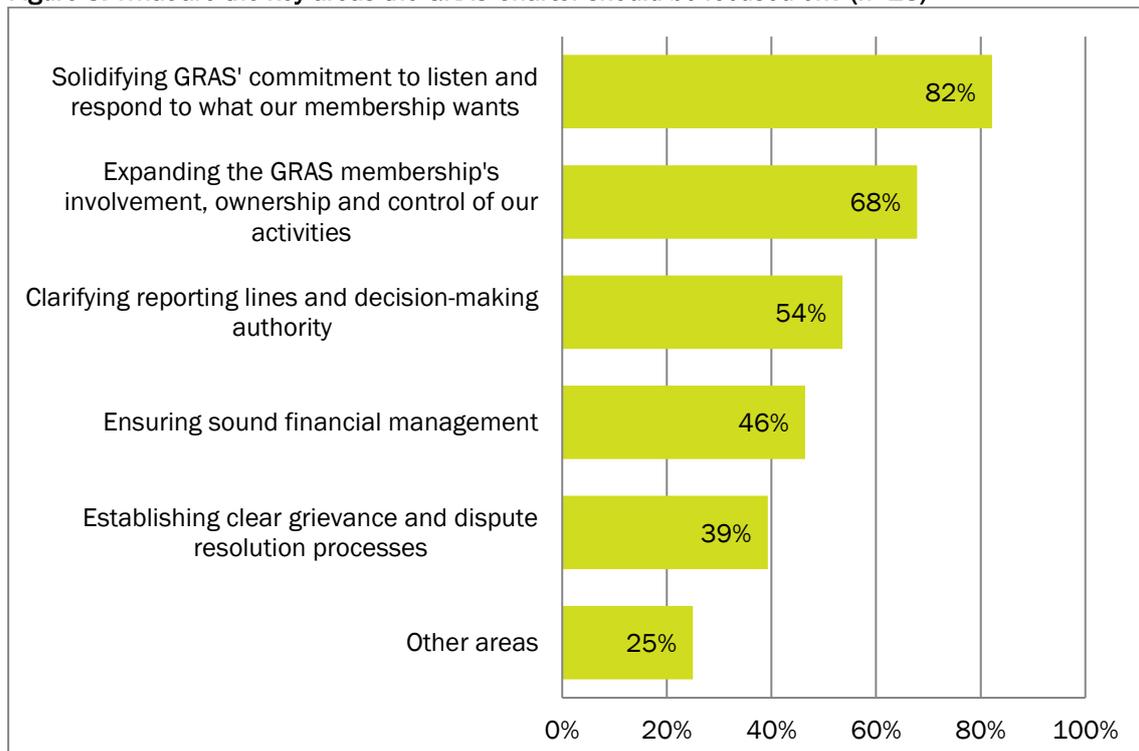
The charter should focus particularly on these areas, and address other issues that arise through its development. Respondents to our survey have already suggested we consider:

“More executive transparency. More Committee power. Ability to attend meetings. Committee involvement in decisions.”

“Having a well-connected Committee to support linking in to a range of training and [PD] opportunities across the VPS and sharing information about them regularly, including those that members themselves have an involvement in.”

A range of activities in 2016 have supported these ideas – including increased community engagement on GRAS social and PD events, inviting Committee members to Executive Team meetings, and the consultation process to develop this plan for GRAS' future. That sharing of responsibility and authority has to continue for GRAS 2021 to be what our community want.

Figure 8: What are the key areas the GRAS Charter should be focused on? (n=28)



As a document reinforcing and formalising GRAS' connection with its community, the charter should be developed collaboratively by the Committee and membership. Any GRAS member interested to contribute should be given an opportunity to, and opportunities should be provided for input and feedback from the whole community to ensure the final product represents what we want.

GRAS is on a transition towards more ongoing, multi-year relationships with its membership. Attendees at the workshop acknowledged this and noted that although the organisational structure described above "makes sense" for GRAS in 2016, it might not in the future.

For example, a GRAS 2021 that includes alumni effectively in all their activities might decide an Alumni Subcommittee was not needed, or might establish a new way for senior alumni to provide advice and guidance in a way that was convenient to them. A GRAS 2021 with stronger engagements to graduates and alumni from other graduate programs might also rethink its organisational structure, or its approach to communications and events planning.

After their establishment, future GRAS Committees should continue to review and adapt the charter and any other guides so they remain relevant and useful to our community.

Our commitment:

The GRAS Committee will immediately begin working with our community to develop the GRAS charter, and a future GRAS Committee should continue and finish this work in 2017.

The charter will support our objectives and goals by helping GRAS to be:

- More proactive in seeking both opportunities for, and input from, our membership.
- More responsive in using that input quickly and effectively.
- More open in all our dealings.

A future GRAS Committee in 2021 should consider reviewing the charter and ensuring it continues to meet the needs of our membership into the future.

How should GRAS communicate?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

The GRAS Committee operate several mailing lists that help our members decide what is relevant to them, including lists for:

- the weekly bulletin
- Monthly Alumni Drinks reminders
- the Quarterly Alumni Newsletter
- occasional PD content
- occasional social content

In 2015, GRAS started a GRAS Community Facebook Group for members to connect and share news directly with one-another. This year, GRAS has experimented with new types of content in regular emails, including interviews, announcing member-run events.

Later this year, GRAS will be preparing a set of communications guidelines, to sit under the GRAS Charter and provide clarity about the type of content and set of platforms work best for the GRAS community.

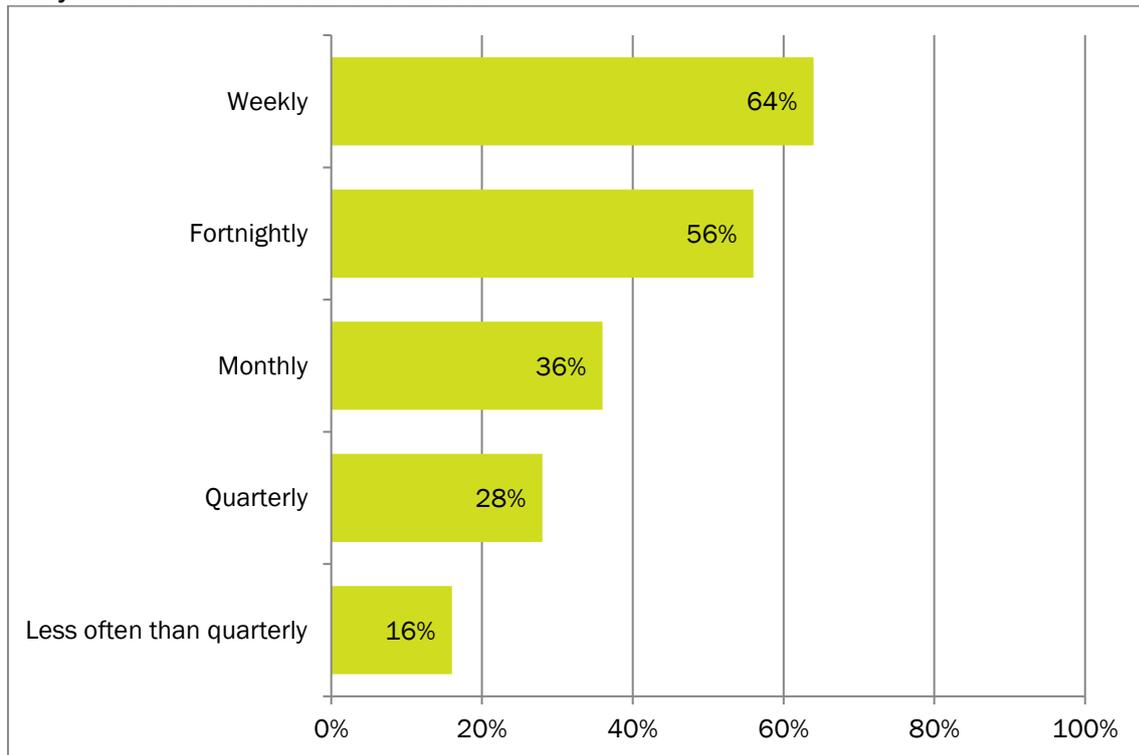
Where do we want to be in 2021?

GRAS' key piece of communication is the weekly bulletin sent to its members. Our online survey collected information about how regularly respondents were happy to receive communications and how much information should be included.

Figure 9 below shows that 64% of respondents (16/25) were happy to receive weekly correspondence, but other respondents preferred less frequent communications. Figure 10 shows, for each frequency (weekly/fortnightly/etc.), how much content respondents thought should be included. For example, all of the people who were happy to receive communications less than quarterly thought those communications should include at least 10 items/articles.

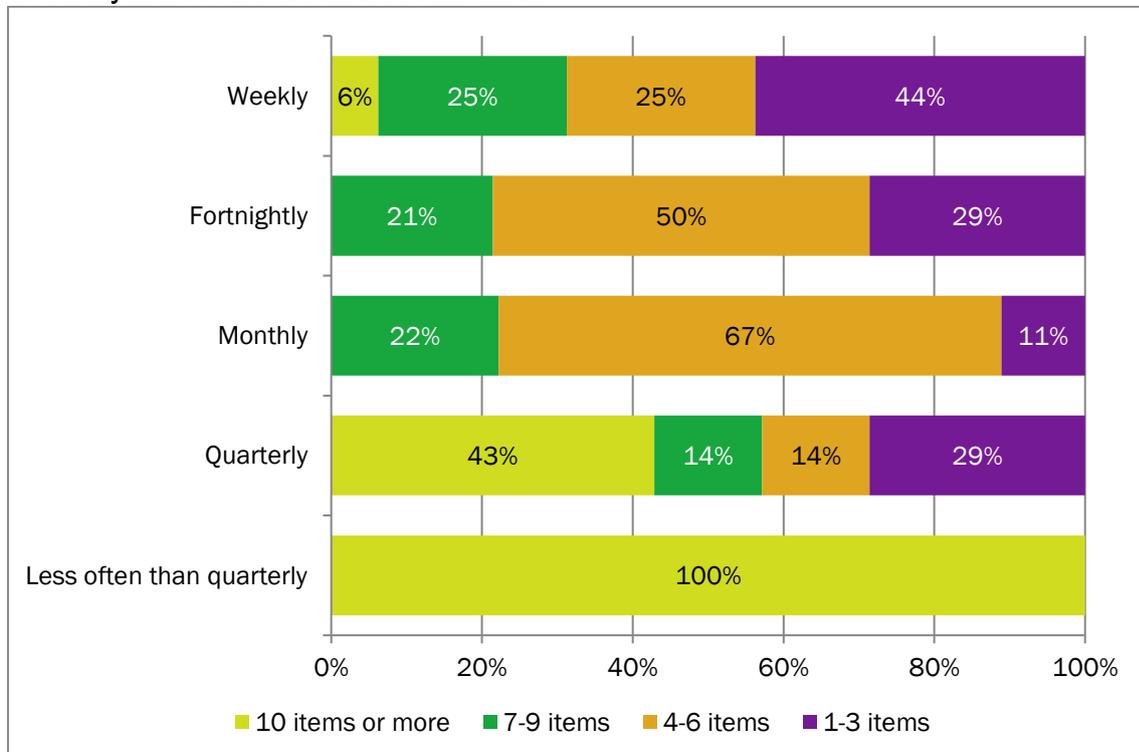
Generally, most (but not all) respondents were happy to receive frequent communications from GRAS, and for less frequent communications to include more information. This information should be considered in more detail when GRAS develops its communications guidelines later in the year.

Figure 9: How frequently would you like to receive regular email communications from GRAS, and how many items or articles should be included?



Proportion of all respondents (n=25) who indicated a preference for a particular frequency of communications.

Figure 10: How frequently would you like to receive regular email communications from GRAS, and how many items or articles should be included?



Proportion of respondents indicating a preference for a frequency, who indicated a preference for a particular number of items/articles per communication.

At our second workshop on 29 July 2016, attendees discussed ways to encourage GRAS' members to share more news and opportunities with one another. As with our discussions about "What do GRAS' alumni members want?" and "How can GRAS help its members support one-another?", attendees raised the idea of a GRAS website that might support this.

We also discussed that more encouragement around information-sharing through the GRAS Community Facebook Group, or clarifying appropriate processes with our communication guidelines, might achieve the same goal.

Attendees also discussed the idea of a more readily-available and engaging Annual Report. The current-format GRAS Annual Report is prepared for each GRAS Annual General Meeting to summarise the year's activities, but is not widely read or understood within the community. An alternative, more interactive product could be condensed, available through GRAS' social media pages and seek community input before a new year begins.

It's still unclear exactly what type of support, processes and infrastructure a more connected GRAS community needs, but as our communications guidelines are completed and a new charter commits us to be more engaged and responsive, future GRAS Committees should continue to think about the platforms and infrastructure they use to stay connected with our membership.

Our commitment:

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to listen for and respond to feedback on our bulletins and other communications content.

We will establish a set of communications guidelines in this GRAS Committee's term, to provide a clear and consistent approach to communications, based on what works best for our members.

We will also investigate new approaches and platforms that make our information – especially key documents like annual reports, charters and plans – more accessible and interactive.

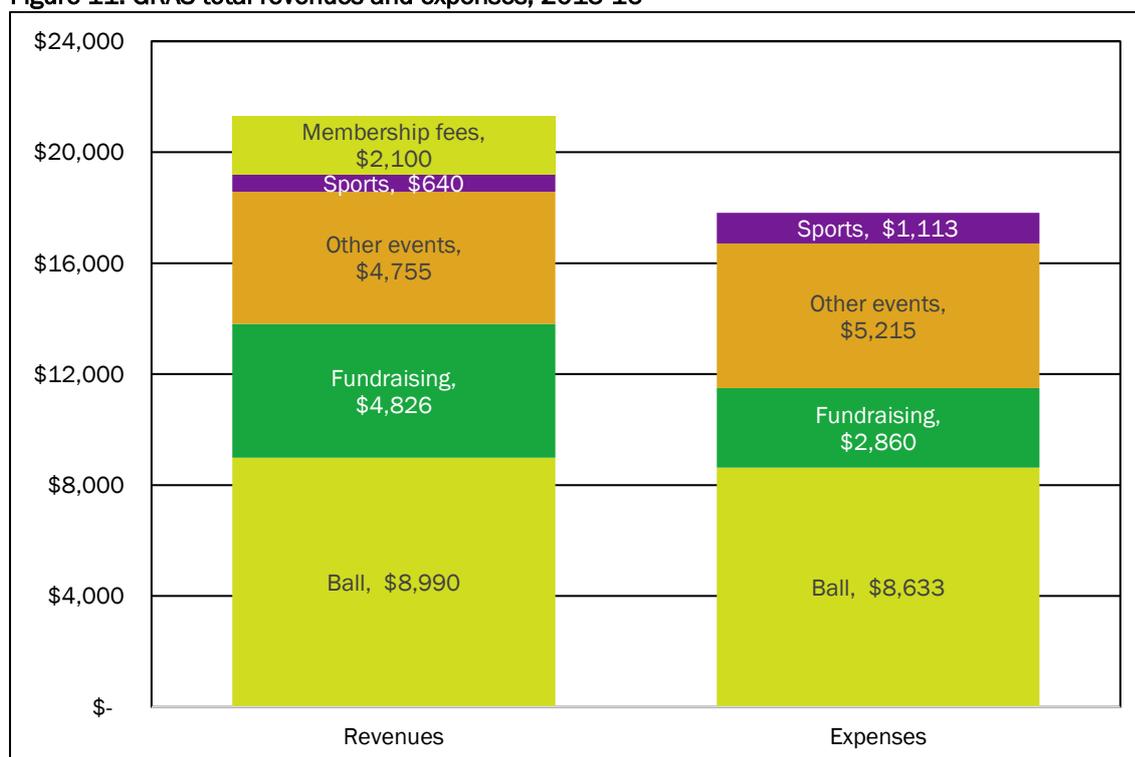
How should GRAS manage its finances?

Where is GRAS in 2016?

The GRAS Committee volunteer their time in directing and coordinating GRAS' activities. Most of those activities are cost-recovered from the specific members who participate, with shortfalls made up by raising membership fees and chocolate fundraising. GRAS' Treasurer ensures probity in our financial dealings and approves any significant expenses before they are committed.

The 2015 GRAS Committee's activities generated a net revenue of approximately \$3,500. GRAS' total revenues and expenses from that period are outlined below. These are adapted from the 2015-16 GRAS Annual Report, where they are available in further detail.

Figure 11: GRAS total revenues and expenses, 2015-16



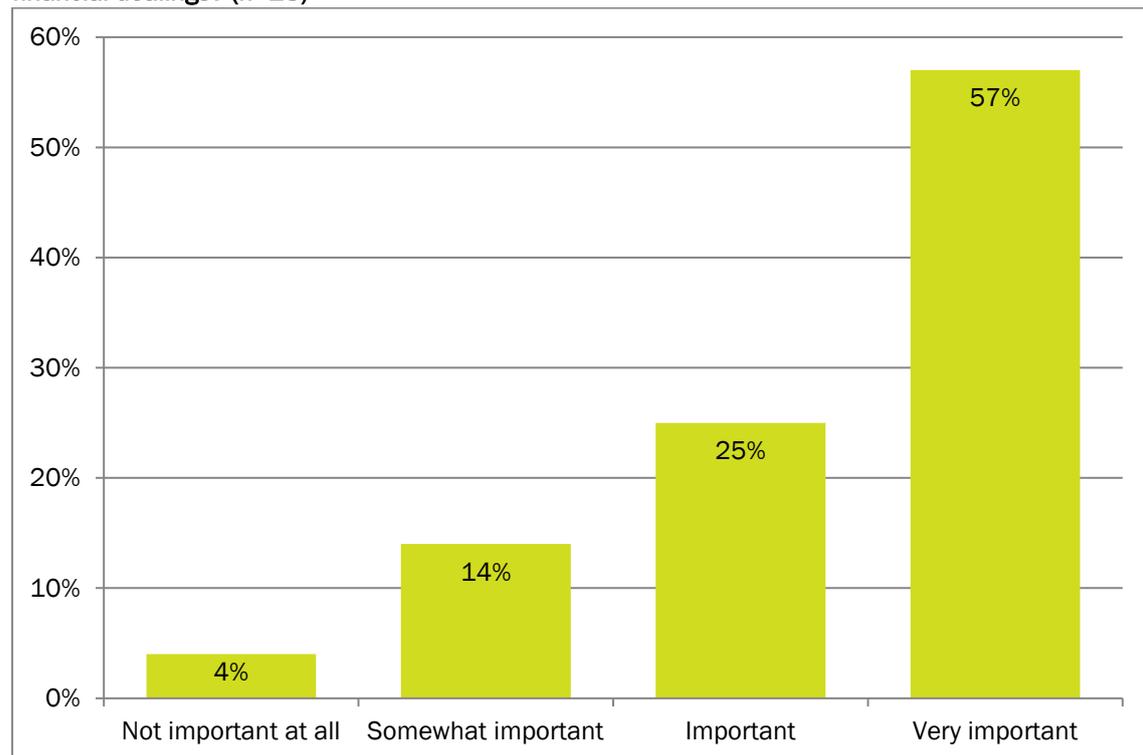
Where do we want to be in 2021?

Feedback through our workshops and online survey showed that probity in GRAS' financial dealings is very important to our membership. Clarity and transparency was also very important. While GRAS' Treasurer does provide oversight and probity, some responses to the survey revealed these mechanisms might not be clear to our community:

"... An indication at the start of the year regarding what exactly the membership fee will pay for/subsidise..."

"GRAS should set up clear financial guidelines, have a discussion on what amount of contingency is acceptable."

Figure 12: How important is it to you that GRAS follows clear processes and is transparent in its financial dealings? (n=28)



Some people commented that GRAS' current paid membership approach might create a barrier to entry, especially for groups GRAS doesn't already have strong traction with. One solution to this might include seeking sponsorship to fund GRAS' activities. For example, the DELWP/DEDJTR YPN is managed by a volunteer Committee, but funded by those departments.

However, sponsorship might have impacts on GRAS' independence. GRAS' Committee aims to be agile and responsive, and most of its networking activities are socially-focused, and financial support might come with reporting or behavioural expectations that could impact these goals. One respondent said:

“An entry fee is a barrier to new members, and one-off payment from grads feels weird for an alum society. I do really value GRAS' financial independence though - are there any ways to change the model and stay independent?”

In developing its charter and financial guidelines, and into the future, the GRAS Committee should continue to think about the trade-off between accessibility, agility and independence that works best for its community.

Our commitment:

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue in its commitment to probity in all our financial dealings.

We will establish financial guidelines in this GRAS Committee's term, to formalise our key financial processes and improve their clarity and transparency.

Conclusion

GRAS' transformation since 2013 has led to a larger, more-connected membership than in previous years. To support this membership and as that trend continues, this and future GRAS Committees should consider the discussions our community had during our consultation process in July 2016 and the commitments made in this report to strategic goals that will help us become the kind of community we want to be in 2021.

Our consultation and commitments are documented in the preceding chapters associated with each theme. The commitments are consolidated in Appendix 1 at page 23, below.

Generally, the key strategic goals of our Committee over the next five years are to:

- formalise the Committee's commitment to being responsive to GRAS' membership, responsive to opportunities and transparent in its operation, through the GRAS Charter and other guidelines.
- communicate its goals and objectives in a more accessible and engaging way, especially to new members so they can understand the group they are becoming a part of.
- Investigate new platforms or processes that could help to support a more engaged community, especially considering how to help members build and maintain strong networks, and engage with one another easily to share opportunities.

GRAS members should continue to support and engage with one another as this happens. They should expect the Committee to deliver on these commitments and work with the Committee to achieve them.

The GRAS community should "check in" against this report over time. That could include the Committee reporting against the commitments, and considering them in planning GRAS' activities. It could also mean the Committee and membership discussing these themes and commitments further to refine them as our needs change over time.

By following this process and meeting these commitments, the GRAS Committee and membership in 2021 will become the connected and supportive community we want to be.

Appendix 1: Our commitments

The key commitments made under this Strategic Plan are consolidated here. Future GRAS Committees should use further engagement with our community, and their own annual planning processes, to add detail and determine how best to achieve these strategic commitments over the next five years.

Future Committees should also consider reporting against these commitments, or adapting them over time as our community's needs evolve.

What do GRAS' graduate members want?

Between 2017 and 2021, the GRAS Committee will build on its existing graduate offerings across the social, PD and news areas.

We will listen continuously for suggestions and feedback, adapting our approach and plans in response to our members' interests. The events we plan will be inclusive to and consider the range of needs in our community.

We will also continue to support opportunities for our graduate members to network and build connections more broadly and quickly, by:

- Working with the VPSC and through informal networks to connect to incoming cohorts as early as possible
- Continuing our engagement with smaller, content-focused groups like the new GRAS Legal Network.
- Finding opportunities to connect our graduate and alumni members, especially where this could lead to peer-mentoring opportunities.

What do GRAS' alumni members want?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to expand its focus on alumni members by listening and responding to their inputs, and developing events and opportunities together with them.

Our existing events will be designed and communicated differently, to become more "alumni-inclusive".

We will also investigate new ways to collect and share information about the GRAS community to support stronger alumni networks.

Who should GRAS welcome as members?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to reach out to a broader range of VPS graduate and alumni cohorts, particularly including those from the DELWP/DEDJTR Science Graduate Program.

We will investigate and establish new ways to maintain our alumni members' connections to our community after they leave the VPS.

We will continue to pay close attention to our existing membership during this transition, especially including VPS GRADS graduates and alumni.

How should GRAS interact with other organisations?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to build on its connections with other organisations across and outside of the VPS, to help us better understand, generate and share opportunities with our members.

We will use a combination of formal and informal approaches, depending on what works best for each organisation we work with.

We will include more junior Committee members in these discussions, using their skills to support the GRAS community and helping our relationships last longer into the future.

How can GRAS help its members support one-another?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will investigate ways to help our community connect and engage with one another more effectively.

We will investigate what GRAS can contribute to the peer-mentoring space, beginning with launching a small “coffee roulette” in this GRAS Committee’s term.

We will continue to investigate ways to support members to share news, events and opportunities with one-another, and provide support and encouragement to our community about how to do this.

How should the GRAS Committee Operate?

The GRAS Committee will immediately begin working with our community to develop the GRAS charter, and a future GRAS Committee should continue and finish this work in 2017. The charter will support our objectives and goals by helping GRAS to be:

- More proactive in seeking both opportunities for, and input from, our membership.
- More responsive in using that input quickly and effectively.
- More open in all our dealings.

A future GRAS Committee in 2021 should consider reviewing the charter and ensuring it continues to meet the needs of our membership into the future.

How should GRAS communicate?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue to listen for and respond to feedback on our bulletins and other communications content.

We will establish a set of communications guidelines in this GRAS Committee’s term, to provide a clear and consistent approach to communications, based on what works best for our members.

We will also investigate new approaches and platforms that make our information – especially key documents like annual reports, charters and plans – more accessible and interactive.

How should GRAS manage its finances?

Over the next five years, the GRAS Committee will continue in its commitment to probity in all our financial dealings.

We will establish financial guidelines in this GRAS Committee’s term, to formalise our key financial processes and improve their clarity and transparency.

