



MEMBER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

The Association Resource Centre's Not-For-Profit Pulse is a bi-monthly publication that shares the results of short online surveys of sector leaders on the topics, trends, issues and benchmarks that really matter in today's not-for-profit sector.

This edition of the Pulse looks at **member recruitment and retention**. Specifically, we examined how critical a concern this issue is for Canadian associations and how the sector feels it will shift in importance in the coming years. We also looked at what NFP professionals feel are the drivers behind the changes taking place as well as what are some of the current and planned actions being taken to help non-profits position themselves to survive...and thrive well into the future.

The sample for this survey comprises a total of 90 Canadian not-for-profit organizations with representation from industry/trade, professional, charity, chamber of commerce and special interest groups. It is important to note that the results of this survey reflect the responses from those surveyed only and are not necessarily representative of the entire Canadian not-for-profit sector.

Issue Overview

Recruiting and retaining members has become a critical concern for non-profit organizations across Canada. At the centre of this massive challenge is providing relevance and meaning in a sector that is evolving at a constant rate.

The Canadian not-for-profit sector is among the biggest in the world. With so many similar organizations out there for members to choose from, not to mention the huge number of resources available online, defining and providing the value and meaning needed to maintain and grow membership is increasingly difficult for many associations.

Further to this, the members of Canadian associations are more diverse than ever before. As association leaders fight an uphill battle trying to meet the needs of members representing a variety of niche professional and/or industry segments, they are also challenged in providing programs and services that do a good job targeting members of different age groups and career stages.

Finally, consolidation is having a significant impact on many of Canada's industry and trade associations, causing some to think about how their associations have traditionally defined membership and how this might evolve over time.

NFP Pulse Survey Highlights

A Growing Concern

Given that members are the lifeblood of most associations, it is not surprising that sector leaders are sitting up and paying attention when it comes to member recruitment and retention. In fact, a significant 39% rated their overall their level of concern about this issue at a 6 or 7 out of 7. A further third (32%) gave a rating of 5.

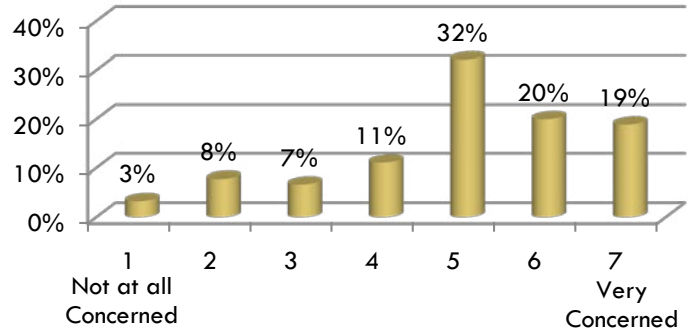
This high level of concern is interesting given that three quarters (76%) of respondents indicated that their membership levels have remained constant or have actually increased over the last three years. On average, membership levels among

participants have grown by 5.1% over the past three years. It appears that participants see storm clouds on the horizon and want to act on this issue before it gets out of control.

The survey results also suggest that concern in this area is growing: A significant 66% of participants ranked their level of concern as being higher today that it was just three years ago.

Even more interesting is that most survey participants don't believe member recruitment and retention is a temporary problem: 67% predict that the issue will become even more critical in the next five years.

Degree of Concern About Member Retention and Recruitment



Notes: Mean – 5.0, N=90

Economy Having an Impact

When asked to identify where their organization is positioned (between worst case and best case) on several issues that affect member recruitment and retention, there are no glaring weaknesses. There are, however, some issues that are causing more concern than others.

Issues Affecting Member Recruitment

People don't join our organization because they don't know about us or what we do

Members aren't joining because of belt-tightening associated with the economic downturn

New membership is down because people feel our dues are too high

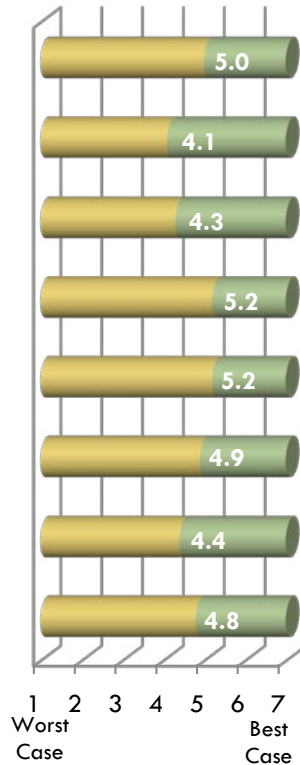
Our new membership numbers are down because other organizations are offering similar products and services

The internet & social media is offering for free many of the resources we have traditionally offered as part of the value proposition to our new members

We are seeing/expect to see a negative impact on membership due to fewer people entering our profession/industry

Potential members don't have time to invest in belonging to our organization

Current members do not recommend our organization to their colleagues



Members join our organization because we are well-known and highly regarded in our sector

Member recruitment hasn't been adversely affected by the economic downturn

Members feel joining our organization is well worth the membership dues they pay

We attract members because of our unique value proposition

Our value proposition has not been adversely affected by the internet social media

We are seeing/expect to see growth in membership due to more people entering our profession/industry

Time constraints are not a factor adversely affecting member recruitment

Many new members come through recommendations from our current membership base

Notes: N=88

The biggest issue in member recruitment appears to be the impact of the economic downturn. The average score on this issue sits at the mid-point between the best case and the worst case confirming that many organizations have been adversely affected. Fortunately, most see this as a temporary influencer and expect membership numbers to improve as the economy recovers.

Another area of concern is that prospective members feel their dues are too high. However, the bigger concern among participants is that their organizations are not delivering sufficient value to justify their fees. In these cases, organizations may need to revisit their value proposition. Time constraints of potential members is also a concern for many respondents. The challenge for not-for-profits is to make it easy for members to participate and make use of their services.

In contrast, elements that respondents believe are having a positive impact on member recruitment are their association's unique value proposition, members' sense of pride in belonging to their organization, and their reputation among different stakeholder groups.

On the member retention front, there are no issues that stand out as being particularly negative. A key strength, however, is that respondents feel they are well positioned because of their unique ability to address members' needs. Importantly, respondents also do not feel that they are negatively impacted by the aging population or social media.

Issues Affecting Member Retention

People don't renew because they don't think they are getting bang for their buck

Members are leaving because of belt-tightening associated with the economic downturn

We are losing members because they feel our dues are too high

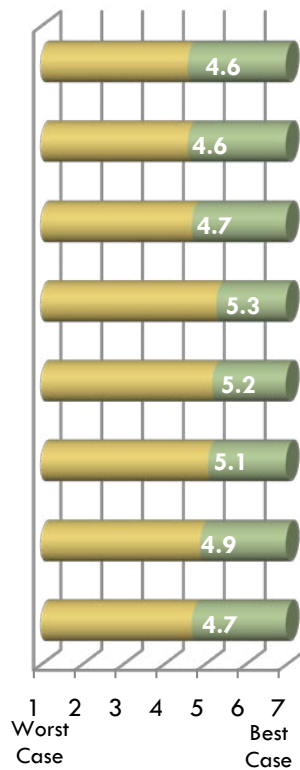
Members are leaving because there are other organizations they feel better meet their needs

Members are leaving because they are finding for free online many of the resources and services that are part of our membership offering

Members are leaving due to retirement

Our members are too busy to belong to our association

Members are leaving because they don't feel involved or engaged with the association or the decision-making process



Members feel they get great value and meaning for their membership dollars

Members are staying with our organization despite tough economic times

Members feel belonging to our organization is well worth the membership dues they pay

We are the only organization that adequately addresses the needs of our members

Our value proposition has not been adversely affected by the internet social media

The aging population has not affected our current membership numbers

Time constraints are not a factor adversely affecting member retention

Members renew because they are truly excited about what is going on and want to play a role in helping the organization achieve its goals

Notes: N=83

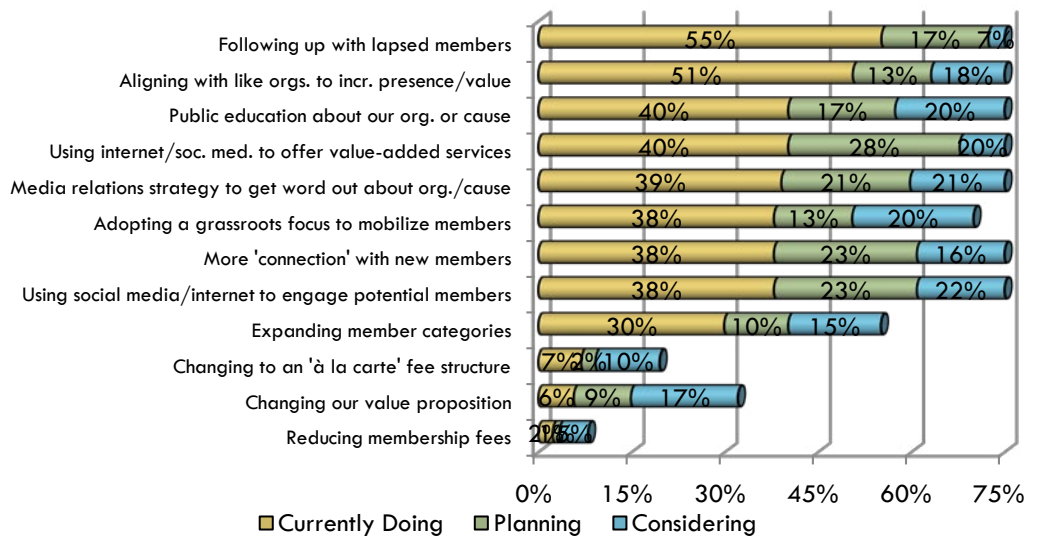
Associations Focus on Community Engagement and the Value Proposition

The top actions organizations are taking to retain and recruit members can be broadly grouped into two areas – engagement and improving their value proposition.

The most common action participant organizations are taking to mitigate the challenges associated with member recruitment and retention is to follow up with lapsed members (55% of participant organizations currently do this and 17% are planning to do this). Other ways respondents are engaging their members and prospects include reaching out to 'connect' with new members, using social media to engage potential members and adopting more of a grassroots focus to mobilize the current member network.

Another key action organizations are taking is aligning or partnering with 'like' organizations to increase their presence and expand their value proposition (64% of survey participants do or plan to do this). Many are also using the internet and social media to offer value-added services. Finally, not-for-profits are trying to improve their value proposition by better representing the members they serve. Specifically, public education and/or having a media relations strategy to get the word out about their organization or cause are common actions being taken.

Actions With Respect to Member Recruitment & Retention



Notes: N=87

Coming Up

The results shared in this issue of the Association Resource Centre's Not-for-Profit Pulse are just a few key highlights from the data gathered as a part of this research initiative. Be sure to bookmark our resource centre and follow our blog (www.resources4associations.com) for further analysis and discussion.

The upcoming NFP Pulse will be on not-for-profit sector **revenue generation**. Specifically, we will examine some of the ways different NFP's are generating the funding necessary to run their organizations, as well as what is working and what is not. Please visit our blog to access your copy of the survey and receive a complimentary copy of the results as thanks for your participation.

Help Us Build a Great NFP Sector Community!

What are the trends, issues, challenges and opportunities you want to learn about? Join the conversation and help us to choose future topics for the NFP Pulse. Each issue will include relevant, research-based information and analysis on a topic that is top-of-mind to not-for-profit leaders. If you have a suggestion or would like more information on how you can participate, please visit our blog or use the information below to contact us directly. Thanks for your input – we can't wait to help your organization achieve its full potential!

About the Association Resource Centre

The Association Resource Centre is a full-service consulting firm that specializes in providing quality research and strategic planning services to the not-for-profit sector. We are a Canadian organization with offices in Ontario and British Columbia and have been in operation for 12 years. Our long list of extremely satisfied clients range from municipal to international in scope and represent a broad range of industries.

Ottawa
 120-1568 Merivale Road
 Ottawa, ON K2G 5Y7 Canada
 Phone: (613) 825-8480 | Toll Free: (877) 336-3329

Victoria
 110-174 Wilson Street, Suite 347
 Victoria, BC V9A 7N7 Canada
 Phone: (250) 479-7449 | Toll Free: (888) 479-7449

Company Website: www.associationconsultants.com
 Find us on Twitter: @arctweeter

Blog & Resource Centre: www.resources4associations.com
 Join us on Facebook: Association Resource Centre

