

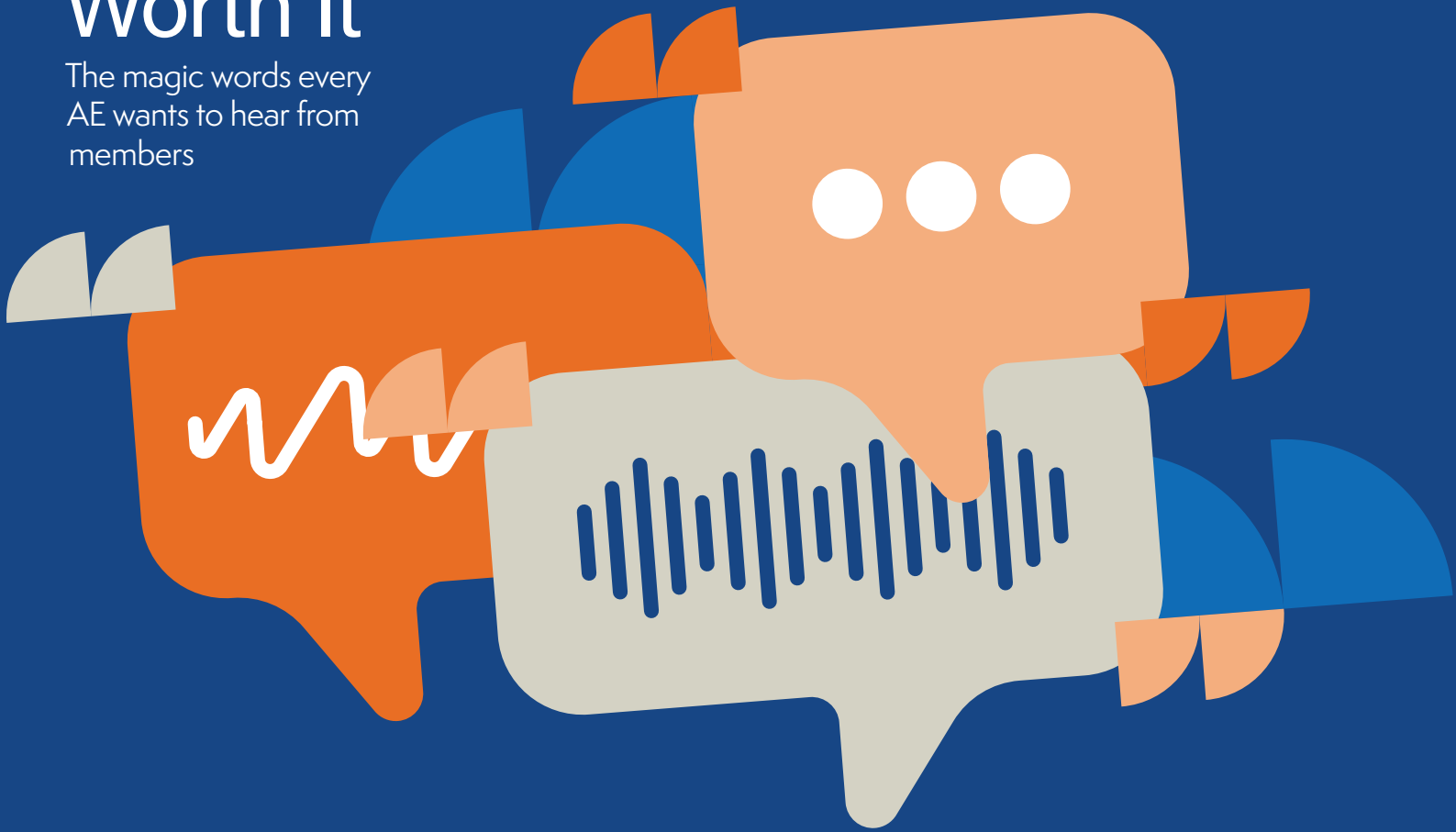
WINTER 2023

AEXPERIENCE

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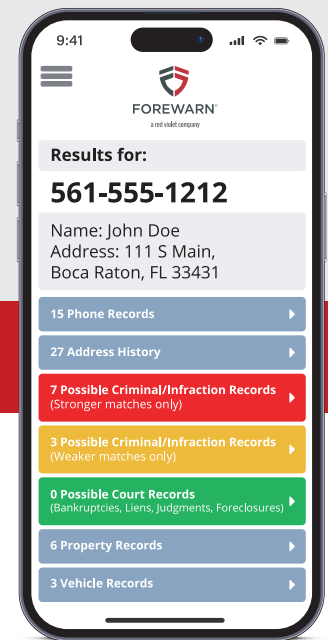
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— John Gormley, CEO
Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®
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AEXPERIENCE

AExperience, powered by REALTOR® Magazine, covers activities, programs, best practices, trends and ideas in REALTOR® association management.

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ON THE WEB

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NAR Spire is here! This mentorship program helps individuals learn the fundamentals of the real estate industry, fosters education and empowers serious consideration of real estate as a career path. Help further DEI efforts in your community as a Spire Association Partner.





AEC CHAIR

Member Retention = Association Stability

Well, hello 2023! A new year brings new opportunities. Let's go! As the National Association of REALTORS® Association Executives Committee chair this year, I am thrilled to lead, collaborate and serve alongside my AE peers to improve our industry. Less than 10 years ago, I was the local government affairs director for the Birmingham Association of REALTORS®. Now on this amazing journey, I've found my home, serving as AE for the Sacramento Association of REALTORS®. As I reflect on this issue's theme, member retention, I know that it remains a constant challenge for every AE, no matter what season your career is in.

That's why I'm so excited about this year's Riding with the Brand campaign, which makes its stop in Sacramento on May 3 for the California Association of REALTORS® Legislative Day. I'm also very excited about President Kenny Parcell's vision! At the core, it's an invigorating reminder and showcase of our true value as REALTORS® and as associations—and the impact we have on communities.

NAR has developed three communications toolkits to help you create messaging for member and consumer outreach programs, including Riding with the Brand events. See page 15.

There is no one-size-fits-all membership retention plan. But understand-



Jessica Coates, RCE, is CEO of the Sacramento Association of REALTORS® and 2023 AEC chair.

ing and articulating your value is half the battle.

Here are a few nuggets of inspiration that can guide us on our collective journey:

- Embrace initiatives focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. Our long-term stability will depend on it!
- Reward members. Congratulate them. Remind them of services they get as members. They should always feel as if they can't afford *not* to be a member.
- Engage members with surveys. Then, make the bold and necessary changes to address members' needs. Data is powerful!
- Remember that a personal touch is still an important element.
- Let's Ride with the Brand in 2023! Embrace who we "R," and take pride in what we do and the impact we have in our communities.

I hope you enjoy this issue of AExperience. 2023 AEC vice chair Theresa Hatton, RCE, CAE, and I look forward to creating and expanding resources for the AE community as we ride with the brand to continue elevating the value of REALTORS® and our associations.

AEXPERIENCE

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The AExperience editorial board reviews each issue and provides critical feedback, proposes story ideas and stays in touch with fellow association executives nationwide to scout out new programs and products to share with the AE community. To join the editorial board, write an article or contribute information, email Danielle Moores, senior editor, AExperience magazine, danielle.moores@theYGSgroup.com.



Good Neighbor Awards

These families did not have an emergency safety net, so the need was quickly uncovered. It is far greater than anyone knew.

Jennifer Barnes
Founder, Solidarity Sandy Springs

REALTOR® Jennifer Barnes began distributing food to a few families at the start of the pandemic. She soon discovered the vast unmet need for help in the community. Today, **2,600 volunteers** provide food and other services to **25,000 families**.



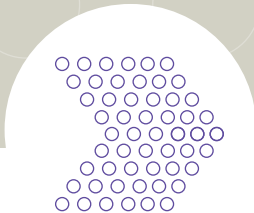
2023
ENTRY
DEADLINE
APRIL 19

IS ONE OF YOUR MEMBERS A GOOD NEIGHBOR?

Since **NAR's Good Neighbor Awards** could mean **\$10,000 and national exposure** for a worthy cause in your community, encourage your members to apply.

Go to nar.realtor/gna for the application and a toolkit to help AEs promote this program to their members.





AOR IN ACTION

NEWS AND IDEAS FROM YOUR PEERS



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INNOVATION

REACHing for New Tech

Chicago-area REALTORS® will be among the first to see local technology startups that could help them further modernize the real estate experience.

That's thanks to the Chicagoland REACH Lab, a collaboration between the Chicago Association of REALTORS®, Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®, North Shore-Barrington Association of REALTORS® and Midwest Real Estate Data (MRED). REACH Labs are an outgrowth of the National Association of REALTORS® REACH technology accelerator. They connect real estate professionals with startups focusing on real estate, mortgage, home services and insurance through

quarterly innovation showcases. Chicagoland REACH Lab hosted its first showcase at the end of 2022, featuring three new tools, including an app that gives brokers access to real-time measures of tax liability.

Any local or state association can launch a REACH Lab, and no investment commitment is required. The REACH scale-up team provides guidance, along with a framework and set of tools to help associations find new tech companies, evaluate new technology, mobilize members to share tech they've discovered and more.

nar-reach.com/labs



We're starting to recruit what we're calling scouts, members with an ear to the ground for emerging technology—who may have relationships with developers, entrepreneurs or investors—to help us really build this [REACH Lab] program throughout the region."

—Zack Wahlquist, CAE, chief operating officer, Chicago Association of REALTORS®

More Than \$100K

St. Charles REALTORS® raised \$102,000+ at its annual RPAC Auction, setting a record for the most raised in a stand-alone event by any Missouri local association. The auction—named for past president and major RPAC supporter Cindy Fox-Griffey—featured nearly 200 items, from a vintage-style popcorn maker to a Florida vacation. According to CEO Gwen Walters, the auction's success can be directly attributed to President Matt Becker's infectious passion for RPAC and what it does to back candidates who support homeownership.



DISASTER RESPONSE

Ian's Silver Lining

After Hurricane Ian struck South Florida in late September, Eric Stegemann, CEO of Tribus, which develops custom real estate brokerage websites, saw a post by Jeff White, director of MLS at Royal Palm Coast REALTOR® Association. White wanted to connect with other MLS and association staff on ideas to help members and the public when dealing with natural disasters.

Stegemann, who is based in Destin, quickly typed back, "Our Solid Earth division at Tribus would be happy to help spin something up for you to show housing available to those displaced. Let us know how we can help."

That simple exchange would turn into hurricanehomes.org, an online database of rental homes that reached more than 17,000 listings as of December

2022. Naples Area Board of REALTORS® and Bonita Springs-Estero REALTORS® joined with Royal Palm Coast to populate the site created by Tribus and Solid Earth. At its highest point, 14,000 unique families accessed the site and reviewed 68,000 property pages in just one week.

Ad revenue from the website is donated to 501(c)(3) organizations such as Florida Disaster Fund and Florida Realtors Disaster Relief Fund. Meanwhile, Tribus is developing other databases for disasters such as wildfires and earthquakes, plus a disaster playbook for REALTOR® associations on how to work with clients in the path of a natural disaster.

📍 hurricanehomes.org



Our AE is the epitome of relationship building. He doesn't speak badly of others, and even when they disagree, he doesn't separate himself from them but continues to be their friend. He doesn't like the limelight, but through his service, he has influenced everyone who comes in contact with him to be leaders."

—“Why I Appreciate My AE” Testimonial

📍 For more member testimonials, visit www.nar.realtor/ae/professional-development/ae-awards-and-recognition/why-i-appreciate-my-ae-appreciation-day-testimonials

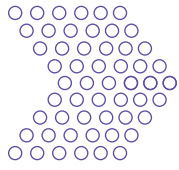


Start Planning for Volunteer Days: June 3–11

During the 2023 REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors Volunteer Days, June 3–11, your association can be part of a nationwide collective force for good. Rally your members to participate and serve as shining examples in your community. Last year, thousands of REALTORS® from at least 50% of the nation's 1,138 REALTOR® associations shared their heart and their time:

- Ventura County Coastal Association of REALTORS® (Calif.) sponsored a laundry day for families.
- San Antonio Board of REALTORS® (Texas) volunteered at the PTSD Foundation.
- Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS® (N.C.) harvested zucchini, then members of the association's Young Professionals Network packed and delivered the hand-picked produce and other groceries for the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle.

📍 Access the REALTOR® Volunteer Days Toolkit at nar.realtor/realtors-are-good-neighbors



AOR IN ACTION

NEWS AND IDEAS FROM YOUR PEERS



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AFFORDABILITY

For Demonstration

Every day going into work, Danielle Blake, chief of commercial at MIAMI REALTORS®, would pass a container graveyard—empty containers being stored near Miami International Airport.

So, when MIAMI REALTORS® started thinking about new ways to address housing affordability, Blake remembered those containers. That was the seed for a demonstration project by MIAMI REALTORS®—supported by a National Association of REALTORS® Community Outreach grant and in partnership with the city of South Miami and Miami-Dade County, which donated the land in exchange for a 20-year deed restriction to maintain affordability. The six-year project would take two shipping containers, convert them into an affordable housing unit and, through that process, identify barriers to construction and affordability.

Finished in 2021, the project has already changed some policies, and the ripple effect is ongoing. For example, the city commission approved a zoning code modification to open 40 other land parcels for future container homes.

The project drew huge public interest, says Blake, and helped strengthen relationships with county and city officials. One even told her, “I had no idea REALTORS® cared about these issues.”

“It really changed his perspective,” says Teresa King Kinney, RCE, CAE, MIAMI REALTORS® CEO.

miamirealtors.com/containerhome



“Our AE is a wealth of information. She is not a full-time employee of our small board, yet she flexes her availability to meet the needs of the board. She is kind and caring, pays attention to every detail and is a total joy to be around. She is the backbone of our organization.”

—“Why I Appreciate My AE” Testimonial

Congratulations to New RCEs



Tabatha Amodio, RCE
Aiken Association of REALTORS®, S.C.



Marissa Cyr, RCE, CAE
Cape Cod and Islands Association of REALTORS®, Mass.



Sallie Arnold, RCE
Grand County Association of REALTORS®, Colo.



Justin Davidson, RCE
Massachusetts Association of REALTORS®



Tiffany Banks, RCE, CAE
Nevada REALTORS®



Jim DeMaio, RCE
REALTOR®
Association of Southern Kentucky



Emily Chenevert, RCE
Austin Board of REALTORS®, Texas



Angela Gibson, RCE
Boise Regional REALTORS®, Idaho



Madison Cooper, RCE
Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS®, S.C.



Alane Gilbrech, RCE
San Mateo County Association of REALTORS®, Calif.



ADVOCACY

Winning Pitch

Kelly Thornton, president-elect at Greater Piedmont REALTORS®, Va., took a deep breath, then took the stage. One minute later, she had delivered the winning pitch, earning a \$5,000 grant at the 2022 Leadership Summit Pitch Battle, which took place in Chicago in August. Thornton talked about her association's work to assure that the rural town of Culpeper,

Va., could keep its USDA Rural Development loan status, which has enabled 108 families to buy a home.

With its \$5,000, Greater Piedmont is partnering to furnish supplies and volunteers to complete emergency home repairs for veterans. "We want to give back to them and highlight another value of the REALTOR® difference in our local com-

munities," says Debbie M. Werling, CEO.

"Many people view REALTORS® as people who help sellers sell and buyers buy," adds Thornton. "But this is just one example of how we are advocating for property owners, buyers and sellers every day. We appreciate that NAR is bringing attention to projects such as this one. It's what we do. That's Who We R!"



Conor Gillis, RCE
New York State
Association of
REALTORS®



Steve Mapes, RCE
First MLS, Ga.



Kelly Reynolds, RCE
Southern Maryland
Association of
REALTORS®



Hugh Gordon, RCE
Frederick County
Association of
REALTORS®, Md.



Letty Merritt, RCE, CAE
Portland
Metropolitan
Association of
REALTORS®, Ore.



Melinda Skinner, RCE
Orlando Regional
REALTOR®
Association, Fla.



Greta Haas, RCE
Iowa Association of
REALTORS®



Michael Miller, RCE
Long Island Board of
REALTORS®, N.Y.



**Austin Smallwood,
RCE**
South Carolina
Association of
REALTORS®



Erin Hickey, RCE
Lakeshore
REALTORS®
Association, Wis.



Jina Myers, RCE
Northern Virginia
Association of
REALTORS®



Ali Taylor, RCE
Orlando Regional
REALTOR®
Association, Fla.



Stacy Kelley, RCE
New Hampshire
Association of
REALTORS®



Amanda Oboza, RCE
Greater Lansing
Association of
REALTORS®, Mich.



Jeremy Walker, RCE
Alabama Association
of REALTORS®



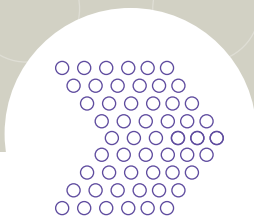
Jeffrey Ledford, RCE
Georgia Association
of REALTORS®



Libby Rentz, RCE
New York State
Association of
REALTORS®

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SERVING SPECIALTIES

NAR Recognizes 30 for Global Achievement

Congratulations to these REALTOR® associations for bringing awareness to their members about global business opportunities.



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Greater San Diego Association of REALTORS®
MetroTex Association of REALTORS®
Nevada REALTORS®
Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS®
Ohio REALTORS®
REALTOR® Association of Sarasota and Manatee
Royal Palm Coast REALTOR® Association
Staten Island Board of REALTORS®
West and Southeast REALTORS® of the Valley



Platinum
Austin Board of REALTORS®
Charleston Trident Association of REALTORS®
Chicago Association of REALTORS®
Greater Tampa REALTORS®
Hudson Gateway Association of REALTORS®
Long Island Board of REALTORS®
Naples Area Board of REALTORS®
NC REALTORS®
Orange County REALTORS®
Pinellas REALTOR® Organization and Central Pasco REALTOR® Organization
Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS®
Scottsdale Area Association of REALTORS®
Texas REALTORS®



Silver
Bay East Association of REALTORS®
Birmingham Association of REALTORS®
North Central Jersey Association of REALTORS®
San Antonio Board of REALTORS®
The Inland Gateway Association of REALTORS®
Tri-Counties Association of REALTORS®

24 Associations Earn New Commercial Accreditation

NAR's new Commercial Services Accreditation recognizes associations for a commitment to providing commercial services and engaging commercial members.



Diamond
Bay East Association of REALTORS®
Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie REALTORS®
Central Oregon Association of REALTORS®
Charleston Trident Association of REALTORS®
Commercial Alliance of REALTORS®
Commercial Association of REALTORS®
Wisconsin
Greater Baton Rouge Association of REALTORS®
Greater San Diego Association of REALTORS®
Miami Association of REALTORS®
Orlando REALTORS®
Texas Association of REALTORS®
St. Louis Association of REALTORS®



Platinum
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San Antonio Board of REALTORS®
Scottsdale Area Association of REALTORS®
Space Coast Association of REALTORS®



Gold
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ALL ABOUT

RETEEN

A 12.6% increase in REALTORS® nationally since the pre-pandemic days of 2019—despite a lack of home inventory—has been a boon and also a challenge to local and state REALTOR® associations. Although many association executives are anticipating a drop in members this year, they’re implementing strategies and programs focused on retention.

“With Central Texas being one of the hottest real estate markets in the country, along with our cities’ growth, our membership has grown over the last few years,” confirms Kelea Youngblood, RCE, C2EX, chief marketing officer at Austin Board of REALTORS®. “Additionally, we strive to maintain a professional staff and newly revitalized AMS system that has been able to support our growth.”

In other parts of the country, membership remains steady—with a cautious look to future numbers. “Our industry has seen a lot of attention during the COVID-19 pandemic and the boom that followed,” says Ruth A. Hackney, RCE, CAE, CEO of REALTORS® Association of South Central Wisconsin, based in Madison. “While we have

not yet seen a drop in membership, we do anticipate it will be a factor in 2023.”

In this climate, how can associations best retain members and prepare for future variability?

Built for Success

Since all real estate is local, location and other such factors play a role in membership loss or gain. “Our market is primarily a resort and tourism market, so we always expect a higher amount of attrition than a traditional residential market. We typically budget for 5% to 10% member reduction,” says Laura Crowther, RCE, CEO of Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS®.

At the same time, CCAR continues to innovate and provide the most relevant tools to help members succeed. Member retention relies not only on the real estate market, but also on the business needs of the member. “Retention is mostly a product of the member’s ability to thrive in the industry,” says Hackney. “So, we focus on tools, professional development and networking as our primary member benefit. Our vision is for members to Connect, Learn and Thrive!”

RETENTION

What exactly do members want and need? Associations are asking this and other questions to better serve and retain members.

BY ROSIE WOLF WILLIAMS

At the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS®, 40% of its members have been in the real estate business for less than four years. “These members are generally unfamiliar with negotiating contingencies or marketing a property that has been on the market for an extended period of time,” says CEO Ryan McLaughlin, RCE, CAE. “Our goal is to make a lasting impact by guiding them past the first four years—through education, involvement and encouragement.”

Meighan Harris, RCE, AHWD, CEO of Bonita Springs-Estero REALTORS® in Florida, recently went through a real estate pre-licensing class so she could have the same experience as her members and identify gaps in knowledge that the association could help fill. That might include skills-based training on how to track expenses, lessons on having the right mindset to survive until the first sale, or business-planning strategies that help new members understand how much time to devote to building their business.

“We have built programming, systems and member engagement in a way that meets our members where they are. Whether they engage with us once a year or come to all our events, they can plug in with us and expect to get quality service.”

Kelea Youngblood, RCE, C2EX, Austin Board of REALTORS®

“Most pre-licensing courses teach to the test but provide no direction or information on how to actually conduct business or how to get started,” Harris says. “For that reason, we find it imperative to build skills-based training programs that are beneficial to new members.”

Taking the pre-licensing class enabled Harris to provide more relevant information for new members looking to enter the profession: “Before they join, everything is crystal clear, and they have realistic expectations.”

Once new members join, they need to feel seen and supported, even if they’re not the ones earning recognition for their production or years of service. “Creating recognition opportunities for new members breaks through that barrier,” says McLaughlin. “By rewarding those taking steps toward success early on, you give them the confidence and support often needed to continue in real estate.”

What Members Say They Need

Youngblood says that ABoR’s focus on retention has become more progressive and proactive over the years: “We believe if something is broken, it should be fixed. Therefore, [we] acutely listen to what our members are saying they need.”

The association focuses on four categories: Business Well-being, Personal Well-being, Client Well-being and Career Well-being. “It has helped our members understand what their association offers them and how it helps their overall business sustainability,” she says. “We have built programming, systems and member engagement in a way that meets our members where they are. Whether they engage with us once a year or come to all our events, they can plug in with us and expect to get quality service.”

“Not every member wants to go to the same type of event or mingle with the same people, so we have to be purposeful when planning events,” adds Harris. BSER’s membership retention levels range from 97% to 99%, and Harris surveys members annually to ensure they find value in the association’s services. “My association management system allows for quite a bit of customization, so when a member drops, we make sure to report why.”

Benefits and Support

Associations also need to make sure members are aware of the free services and benefits that are available. “It is important to remind members of the WIIFM—what’s in it for me. Our AMS software also comes with a free member mobile app, so I am able to build a member benefits section for local discounts and such,” says Harris. “We have a very robust leadership academy where we encourage involvement from our membership and let them know that there are advancement opportunities available. I believe our inclusive nature makes our members want to stay.”

The Best Way to Engage Members

To create effective communications, you need to understand your audience. A new *Engagement Segments Guide*, created by a work group of NAR’s Association Executives Committee, will help you communicate with the different groups you interact with regularly, including:

- Association leaders
- Broker-owners and managers
- New members
- Top producers and team leaders
- Commercial and property managers
- Affiliate and appraiser members

 [nar.realtor/member-engagement-guide](https://www.nar.realtor/member-engagement-guide)

CCAR has likewise placed a strong emphasis on association benefits and new member training. It has also enhanced broker engagement and added more training, roundtable discussions and legal consults that address risk management. “We have implemented a drip campaign that introduces new members to all of the programs, products and services we offer,” says Crowther. “Often they are overwhelmed when first joining, and they miss these great opportunities! We are in the process of implementing a new-member concierge service to guide these individuals as they progress through the first 12 to 24 months.”

Meanwhile, ABoR launched a “Be A Member” campaign that stresses the importance of being a part of a network of 18,000 professionals. Personalized support is emphasized, with brand recognition and advanced tools to help business growth. “But that means they have to engage with us and use the services they are subscribing to, which has built trust within our membership—that their association has their back,” says Youngblood.

Youngblood also says that ABoR created an omni-channel approach to programming and education, providing live broadcast, in-person and virtual ways to attend. “We know our members are on the go,” she says. “Being able to plug in however best suits them has increased our attendance and engagement tremendously.”

While RASCW made no major changes in its plans for member retention in 2022, it updated its vision for the association, refreshing branding and communication. It added a monthly member spotlight to its website to promote the types of businesses its members are involved in. “We’ve also implemented a personal health series to ensure that even in a difficult market, they are taking care of themselves,” says Hackney.

Meanwhile, BSER just received its license to become a real estate school with long-term plans of offering pre- and post-licensing courses. “We provide important information and expectations to people who are looking to get started in real estate,” says Harris.

The association also hosts an event the first Friday of each month called Fishbowl Fridays, where members meet at a restaurant or brewery and can throw questions into a literal fishbowl. “For instance, they might ask, ‘What is the best way to follow up with a guest that visited an open house?’” says Harris. “Those in attendance are a mix of new and seasoned agents. This is a judgment-free, recruitment-free zone for members to ask questions to other agents as a way to learn.”

Staying Member Aware

Just as important as knowing what members value is understanding why they leave. “I would say that members who don’t renew typically give it a year or two and realize that they haven’t seen a profit from the money that they have spent in brokers’ fees, board dues, MLS fee and marketing, and go back to something more stable like a salary,” says Harris. “Other than

New Toolkits

One way associations can support member retention is by offering tools to help members communicate both their own value and the pro-consumer, pro-competitive benefits of local MLS broker marketplaces.

The National Association of REALTORS® has created three new communications toolkits to help you do just that. The toolkits are centered around three core areas, also as represented at our [competition.realtor](https://www.competition.realtor) website:

- Fostering Competition
- Consumer Access & Opportunity
- REALTORS® as Champions

Each toolkit includes facts, infographics, Q&A’s and other content that you can use as is or customize.

Questions? Contact Mantill Williams at mwilliams@nar.realtor in NAR communications or Lesley Muchow at lmuchow@nar.realtor in NAR legal.

 thehub.realtor (Toolkits are available through the state AE and local AE Hub communities.)

that, they go into referral mode so they can still keep the license active but seek other employment opportunities.

“When I see they have left because they have changed brokers, I make it a point to let them know that they can still remain primary with us if their broker had a secondary relationship,” Harris adds. “Sometimes it is really just an education issue.”

Some members might struggle with changes in strategies or the implementation of new ideas. But Youngblood says that associations should stop trying to make everyone happy and instead make bold and innovative choices. “Associations get the reputation of being stodgy because they try to be so vanilla that they lose sight of their purpose and, thus, lose value to their members,” she says. “Associations are a community of like-minded people. I think peer-to-peer marketing is so powerful, and associations should generate ambassadors to help them communicate the value they provide.”

Despite an expectation of a decline in membership, Crowther says, CCAR continues to keep a finger on the pulse of the association’s members, asking for feedback on their needs and addressing the current market conditions. “Everything we do is member-forward-focused,” she says. “If the past two-and-a-half years taught us anything, we can pivot on a dime, and we will continue to grow from the lessons of the past.” ■

Rosie Wolf Williams is a writer whose work has appeared in USA Weekend, Woman’s Day, AARP the Magazine and elsewhere.

Taking Care

**of
Tech**



Providing REALTOR®-focused technology services and support can enhance the member experience and aid retention.

By Robert Bittner



Technology is a powerful and essential tool for real estate professionals, helping to streamline branding and promotion, ease colleague and client meetings, improve MLS management and make continuing education even more accessible. But technology evolves faster than many of us can go. It's challenging to know how to get the most from today's devices.

In response to the real estate industry's growing reliance on technology, associations are addressing their members' unique tech needs with new tools, training and support, leading to enhanced member experiences—and the potential for improved member retention.

Serving Up Solutions

According to Tallahassee Board of REALTORS® CEO Steven Louchheim, RCE, CAE, the association's tech support started with a basic computer tuneup service, offering system software updates and virus/malware checks. Today, the association runs a full-service tech shop.

"We do computer purchasing and repair, network installation, TV installation, Wi-Fi, phone systems, virus protection. We also offer backup services, and we've even done a little cybersecurity," Louchheim says. While those are all paid services—discounted for members—the association also manages a members-only help line that offers tech support by phone at no additional charge.

Three employees manage the tech shop, handling seven to 10 service calls and 15 to 20 help-desk calls each week.

Although the association offers an unusually extensive menu of tech support services, Louchheim doesn't believe there's any big secret behind his association's tech success: In the end, it comes down to people. "The only way to make it work is to make sure you hire someone who has not only the technical acumen but also the ability to run the business," he says.

He believes it's also important to build out services slowly over time, "to not put the association in the position of over-promising services." Although the tech shop now has three employees, it didn't start that way: "We started with one employee about 10 years ago," Louchheim says. "Having the patience to build slowly will pay off in the end."

The range of tech services has also grown over the years because of members' growing reliance on technology in their work. "Yes, there are things like Best Buy's Geek Squad, but they have no idea what REALTORS® need in the real estate business," Louchheim says. "REALTORS® rely on a lot of unique technology. We need to make sure that our members' equipment can open lockboxes, that they can access the multiple listing service—things that other businesses don't necessarily need."

Meanwhile, Mike Gazdzik, EPRO, AHWD, director of IT and support services at North Shore–Barrington Association of REALTORS®, has also

been offering personalized tech support to members for over 20 years. "Primarily, we're helping members use a new piece of hardware or do something specific with their phone or computer," he says, which could include helping them create a custom report, archive text messages, get more out of Google Suite or set up a hot spot with their phone.

"I think members really appreciate the fact that we know the industry and we understand their needs in ways that a computer store or phone store never could," Gazdzik says. "I believe that if we can continue to help members discover and use the tools that enable them to excel in their job, we will keep them as members."

Building to Innovate

Helping members make informed decisions about technology was one of the goals behind Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association's new Technology Innovation Lab, part of a new headquarters building currently under construction and expected to be completed this summer.

The focus is on technology that keeps members on the cutting edge of the industry and positions them for long-term business success, says Chief Operating Officer Amanda Ornelas, RCE. "We will feature demos of software and hardware products that help our members succeed, including existing products in the market and some that are currently in development," she says. "We plan that



“For real estate brokers and salespeople, their computer, their phone, their tablet are how they do business. Our members rave about the service because we make sure we get it right. I know for a fact that the members absolutely love it.”

—Steven Louchheim, RCE, CAE, Tallahassee Board of REALTORS.

anything we feature in the innovation lab is something members can walk out the door with and have an immediate positive impact on their bottom line.”

While the initial range of featured hardware and software products has not yet been finalized, Ornelas says the association has a team of people who are continually on the lookout for new technology to showcase, including the latest advances in cameras, customer relationship management and other tools with potential for real estate application.

In addition, she expects the space to provide opportunities for enhanced technology training. “We will have full-time staff focused exclusively on providing technology services, solutions and support,” Ornelas says.

The association also will continue to work with an outsourced technology team—which has been providing in-house tech support to the association—but will equip it with dedicated office space in the new building so it can now serve the entire local REALTOR® community. “Our desire is to equip our members with every competitive advantage we can through idea

generation, technology and new programming, using every aspect of our building to assist us to that end,” Ornelas says.

Simple Solutions, Significant Impact

Not all members expect this level of support. For some, even simple solutions can yield significant results.

For example, Zack Wahlquist, CAE, COO of Chicago Association of REALTORS®, says that the Photofy app service, available from the National Association of REALTORS®, has been particularly valuable in helping members to develop professional-quality branding across the internet and social media and to stand out in the marketplace. The service includes “That’s Who We R” campaign assets that are easily personalized, video tutorials and the opportunity for a discovery meeting to find out more about custom-branded galleries.

But even the humble video call has been a hit with members.

“Unlike some other associations, we haven’t given up on Zoom yet,” Wahlquist says, laughing. “In fact, we’re continuing to run committee meetings virtually. That’s engaging our members a lot more than having them come to the office, navigate downtown, pay for parking, then sit for a couple of hours in a conference room.”

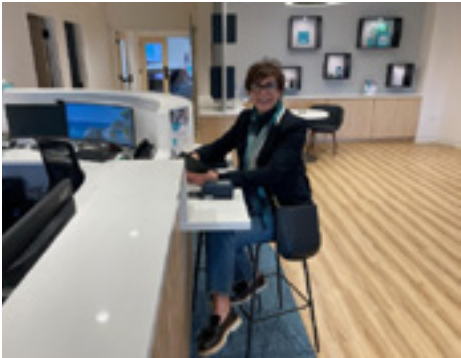
With the association’s continued focus on virtual meetings, Wahlquist

suggests making the most of online presentations. For example, use chat in an engaging way by sharing “links to more information as topics come up during the presentation. Ask the audience brief, fun questions they can respond to easily in chat.”

Also, he says, “Make sure whoever is the host is able to pay attention to the chat and to tech issues during your program. The host should *not* be one of the presenters.”

For training and education, the association has begun developing a series of on-demand, member-only videos on how to accurately complete a range of forms and contracts. For associations with a similar interest, Wahlquist suggests focusing on-demand content on just one or two key areas to start. “For us, that has been video work on completing real estate forms and contracts that we provide and some tips and tricks for new brokers,” he says. “This way, you can see what engagement could look like for you while being very intentional and organized about a specific program.”

High-quality videos don’t have to be expensive to produce, he adds. “Use free or low-cost tools and in-house talent to start your video content before splurging on outsourced content and professional-grade equipment and software,” he says. “You’d be surprised at the kind of content you can create



Above left and middle: Members can stop by North Shore–Barrington Association of REALTORS® for personalized tech support. Right: In this rendering, Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association’s new Technology Innovation Lab features worktables and screens for demos and presentations.

with a smartphone and free apps that can give you a starting point to test video content for your members.”

In all, the association’s commitment to technology outreach and education seems to be a key element in member satisfaction. “We budgeted for a 90% or so renewal rate among our first-year brokers [in 2022],” Wahlquist says. “As of Nov. 1, 2022, we were already at 93%. I think that’s largely because of the tech tools and the outreach we’ve been doing to our new brokers specifically.”

Expanding Your REACH

Inspired by the positive response to its REACH Labs—an NAR program that connects associations with early-stage tech companies with a real estate focus—Denver Metro Association of REALTORS® decided to go one step further, creating interactive educational seminars around these tech offerings, with a theme of “using tech during a market shift.”

Those sessions, known as Masterminds, have caught the attention of members, says CEO Nobu Hata.

REACH Labs has enabled the association to attract early-stage companies and technology that can help solve challenges such as lead generation, lead curation and the post-transaction client experience. Through Masterminds, the association can then have meaningful conversations with members, influencers, broker-owners, managers and top

producers on relevance, feedback and more, he adds.

Masterminds are targeted to members with fewer than three years in the business or with less than 50% referral-based business. “We present tech topics along with other experiences, like panels of top producers that hit on specific topics with each session,” Hata says. “The Masterminds jibe with members’ business flow: value marketing as the year kicks off, client attraction in the spring, client appreciation topics in the fall and lead-generation/curation topics toward the end of the year.”

For other associations that want to launch something similar, Hata suggests, “Research what your member segments are, use the MLS to verify your findings, engage with brokerage leaders within these segments, and invite them and their agents to a presentation. Focus on giving members to thrive *before* they need it. If you don’t know what that might look like, engage with your most productive members and broker-owners.”

Hata adds that by streaming Masterminds events online, the association has opened a gateway for REALTORS® to discover the rest of its offerings as well, leading to better perceived value of membership both locally and throughout the state. “We now have members who are based hours away from our headquarters,” he says.

The Masterminds seminars also have become a known differentiator for the association. “We have brokerage leaders advocating for our membership who are better able to distinguish us from our association competition,” says Hata. “And we’re converting non-REALTOR® licensees to the association.”

A Critical Service

No association we spoke to can say how many members renewed their membership specifically because of the tech services and support the association offered. But all agreed that member feedback indicates strong appreciation for the increased value such services bring to the member experience, making the association that much more critical for their daily work.

“For real estate brokers and salespeople, their computer, their phone, their tablet are how they do business,” Louchheim says. “Our members rave about the service because we make sure we get it right. I know for a fact that the members absolutely love it.”

“While I don’t have any direct data about it aiding retention, my personal opinion is that, as you become more valuable to members, they understand that they are getting good value for their membership, and they’re a lot less hesitant to write that check when it’s time to renew their dues.” ■

Robert Bittner is a Michigan-based author and freelance journalist.

READ MORE

For the latest on REACH Labs, see “REACHing for New Tech,” page 6.



WHAT'S YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH?

QUICK: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PERSUADE A REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONAL TO JOIN YOUR ASSOCIATION?

BY THOMAS A. BARSTOW

Chris Heller wasn't specifically doing an elevator pitch in his April 5 article on agentadvice.com, "5 Reasons You Should Join Your Local Board of REALTORS®."

But the way he presents his advice succinctly touts the benefits for a REALTOR® to join an association.

"By joining your local organization, you'll be gaining access to one of the largest trade organizations in the U.S.—the National Association of REALTORS®," writes Heller, chief real estate officer at OJO Labs and former CEO at Keller Williams Realty International. "Other benefits include the ability to network with local [real estate professionals] and staying informed about local regulations affecting the industry. Local organizations often provide training and education resources. You'll also be able to improve your relationship with your current customers. The title of 'REALTOR' means you've put time and effort into making sure your clients' best interest is at the heart of what you do."

Why real estate professionals should join their local or state association is a question that association executives are always asking, honing their messages to inspire potential members to become not just involved but also fully engaged.



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Short and Sweet

At Howard County Association of REALTORS® in Maryland, recruitment efforts for affiliate and full members are summed up with two phrases: “The partner you want. The support you need.”

Those words were part of a postcard—which also briefly highlighted member benefits—sent to members last year ahead of dues billing.

Sarah Rayne, RCE, CAE, who became CEO in November, says HCAR’s 2,200 real estate agents and preferred partners—its term for affiliates—have come to expect far-reaching services. Her elevator speech centers on a quick summary of the details.

“We have many unique, valuable membership benefits: Free continuing education for all members; involvement in a thriving 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, HCAR Cares; progressive diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; an on-site REALTOR® store with heavily discounted products; a staff with more than 40 years of experience in the REALTOR® association; free quarterly shredding and e-cycling services; and complimentary access to Zip Forms and Smart Charts Pro,” says Rayne. She can attest to the value of the education as well, since she also holds the At Home With Diversity and EPRO certifications.

Real Value

Where else can REALTOR® members get invaluable support services at less than \$2 a day?

It’s important to focus on not only the details of membership but also its low cost, says Candy Roberts Joyce, RCE, CAE, executive vice president of the Middle Tennessee Association of REALTORS®, based in Murfreesboro. She mentions cost directly in her elevator pitch, then discusses

how the investment is well worth it, noting that one of the main benefits is keeping in touch with elected officials and pending legislation. Education is important, too, she says: “Knowledge is the key to success, and it is the never-ending process to learn and hone the current skills and tools that keep our professionals growing and excelling.”


As part of her elevator pitch, Joyce says, “We are the first point of contact for our members’ services, offering stellar education, professional development opportunities, career services, legal risk reduction updates and training, and political advocacy for your career, family and community.” She also rolls out many other services: “Dispute resolution services, career tools that keep you at the top of your game, specialty supplies at a convenient stop-and-shop location, community connections and events that promote the value of a REALTOR®, and social networking with business partners that can assist you and your client.”

She then says that the cost of all that is \$1.52 per day.

“Additionally, we have a fabulous facility for members to train in with the newest technology and multiple rooms for the meeting size they need—and that’s free to use,” she says. “What an amazing investment!”

MTAR serves nine counties in Middle Tennessee, and Joyce says the association’s size naturally brings diversity.

“The diversity of our membership is reflected in our leadership, and we have a unique blend of rural, farms, lake and vacation homes, mountain retreats, and fast-growing cities,” she says. “The only thing we don’t have is beachfront property. We keep active connections with a large delegation of elected officials, and we encourage political action from our members with their local and state elected officials. We are the voice of real estate here.”



“OUR GROWTH STRATEGY IS TIED DIRECTLY TO PROVIDING OUR MEMBERS WITH THE MOST INCREDIBLE EDUCATION, SERVICE AND TOOLS AVAILABLE.”

—KIPP COOPER, RCE, KCRAR AND HEARTLAND MLS

Breadth and Scale

The Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS® is one of the fastest-growing local associations in the country in both member count and geographic size, says Kipp Cooper, RCE, CEO of the Heartland Multiple Listing Service and KCRAR.

His pitch centers on the fact that, with five mergers over the past five years, KCRAR has grown to include 13,100 members that cover 38 counties along almost the entire border of western Missouri and eastern Kansas. Such a large organization also means a broad range of member services. “Our growth strategy is tied directly to providing our members with the most incredible education, service and tools available,” he says.

Cooper, who joined KCRAR seven years ago, also communicates how the organization handles such a large area using a chapter model and three regional service centers located within an hour’s radius from the main office in Leawood, Kansas. The chapters allow agents to keep “a local identity and commitment to community while enjoying the economies of scale and professional staff that come with belonging to a large organization.”

Cooper began his career as a two-term state legislator in New Hampshire when he was 23, a background that helps when advocating for his association. He also talks to potential members about how the association wholly owns Heartland Multiple Listing Service, a regional MLS with more than 12,500 subscribers, and how Heartland MLS is a founder of MLS Grid, a technology initiative that enables MLSs to work together through common standards, licensing and compliance. Heartland’s most recent investment has been the purchase of

the Remine MLS platform with Miami REALTORS® MLS and Austin Board of REALTORS® ACTRIS MLS, an initiative centered around owning and investing in their own technology and future.

“KCRAR and HMLS are places where our members always come first,” Cooper says as part of his pitch. “We have a staff of highly trained and motivated professionals whose top priority is member service and member success. We do this by being inclusive, innovative and adaptive to the industry and our members’ changing needs. We are excellent stewards to our community and assure that our members are part of an organization that is respected, trusted and advocates for our industry.”

A Love for the Work

Then there’s the passion piece.

MTAR’s Joyce has been an AE for more than 28 years. “I still love it each day,” she says. “I have a retired real estate license, and that gives me a deeper appreciation for the actions and efforts our members have to put out there every day.”

Cooper says that the CEO position at KCRAR and Heartland MLS “really is my dream job.”

“The ability to work with so many caring and thoughtful volunteer leaders and staff drives me every day to provide them with the very best I can offer,” he says. “We are all very blessed when we can find a job that makes a difference in people’s lives—and for me that calling has been this amazing industry.” ■

Thomas A. Barstow is a freelance writer and editor based in York, Pa.



Stopping Sexual Harassment

With claims on the rise, here's what associations should do. **BY CHLOE HECHT**



The National Association of REALTORS® Q2 2022 *Quarterly Risk Report* details how the number of sexual harassment claims filed under NAR's Professional Liability Insurance Program through October 2022 have dramatically increased, outnumbering similar claims filed in 2021, 2020 and 2019.

Sexual harassment is illegal under federal, state and local laws and causes decreased employee and member morale and engagement. By following best practices, your association can mitigate the risk of sexual harassment claims and also promote a positive environment where staff and members can further association business without fear of harassing or discriminatory behavior.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination. It is defined as unwelcome verbal or physical behavior such as jokes, innuendos, unwelcome advances, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. Hostile environment sexual harassment occurs when an employee experiences frequent or pervasive unwanted conduct—because of their sex—that unreasonably interferes with their work performance or otherwise creates a hostile work environment. *Quid pro quo* sexual harassment occurs when an authority figure offers or merely hints that the employee will receive preferred treatment or some other benefit, such as a raise or promotion, in exchange for fulfilling a sexual demand. Essentially, the employee's job depends on acquiescence to the demand.

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including at the office, association-sponsored events, unofficial casual gatherings, and even online during virtual meetings or

via social media or email. Keep in mind that a person of any gender can be the victim or perpetrator of sexual harassment. It's important for associations to remember that sexual harassment can involve both employees and members.

Know the Law

To help prevent harassment, first, familiarize yourself with applicable federal, state and local anti-discrimination laws to understand the association's legal obligations, including whether the employer is obligated to provide anti-harassment training to employees. If your association participates in NAR's Professional Liability Insurance Program, check out the State Reference page on the EPL Assist website for more information on state and local laws.

Implement an Anti-Harassment Policy

Second, implement anti-harassment policies for employees and members. Include a definition of sexual harassment, how to report incidents, the association's investigation process and the potential disciplinary action for violations. NAR's Good Sense Governance resource on harassment includes sample policies to help you draft or update your association's anti-harassment policies.

Note that it is illegal under federal law to retaliate against an employee for reporting harassment. Include a "no retaliation" statement in your policy to clearly communicate to employees and

members that the association will not retaliate against someone for reporting any sexual harassment claims.

Conduct Regular Anti-Harassment Training

Third, conduct regular sexual harassment-prevention training for employees and volunteer leaders. Consider also conducting bystander-awareness training, which provides individuals with techniques for how to intervene when they witness harassment. Local or state laws may require your association to conduct these types of training; however, even when not legally required, such training is a helpful best practice to mitigate claims of sexual harassment.

Investigate All Claims

Finally, promptly investigate all harassment claims in accordance with the investigation process outlined in the association's anti-harassment policies. Maintain thorough records documenting all communications with the person being accused, the person making the claim and any witnesses. Should the investigation reveal a reasonable basis to believe that sexual harassment occurred, ensure that harassers are disciplined consistently and in accordance with the association's anti-harassment policy. ■

→ Resources at a Glance

To access the National Association of REALTORS® Q2 2022 *Quarterly Risk Report*, visit nar.realtor/quarterly-risk-report.

For more information on state and local laws, visit the State Reference page on EPL Assist: nar.realtor/employment-practices-legal-hotline.

For sample anti-harassment policies, visit NAR's Good Sense Governance resource on harassment: nar.realtor/good-sense-governance-harassment.



Chloe Hecht is senior counsel, legal affairs, at the National Association of REALTORS®.



To Give or Not to Give

Does your association have a gifts and favors policy?

BY DANIEL DOEPKE



The National Association of REALTORS® new Gifts and Favors Policy states: “Giving gifts of material value and granting or requesting significant personal or professional favors can quickly create a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest, between NAR’s members and its employees.”

When reading the reasoning behind the new policy, you might be thinking, “Should our local association have its own Gifts and Favors Policy?” It is likely a good idea.

Even if your association has never run into an issue with receiving gifts from members, the best time to craft policy is before you run into an issue rather than after. When an association has elected leadership, even the appearance of an improper gift can erode confidence and breed mistrust among members. But how should you go about crafting a good policy?

To begin, a well-crafted policy will often require input from a combination of your leadership and legal counsel. Your attorney can give guidance on any state law that may come into play and help create a policy that is both sensible and legally defensible. Whether this policy belongs in your bylaws, rules and regulations, or as a stand-alone policy is a matter of local discretion, and one that you’ll want to discuss with your leadership.

Getting started might seem like a daunting task, but you don’t need to reinvent the wheel. NAR’s policy can serve as a model for your own policy. Online, you can easily find similar gifts and favors policies from membership organizations to use as a reference as well. Some of your fellow local REALTOR® associations might already have gifts and favors policies that work well for them, or they can offer advice from their own experiences. The Local Association Executives forum on The Hub is a great resource for asking questions when taking your first steps toward creating policy.

As in NAR’s policy, it may be important to distinguish what kinds of gifts would be considered appropriate and what kinds of gifts can be problematic. For example, NAR’s policy grants that reasonable gifts for special occasions or nominal tokens of appreciation given to all employees would not be seen as worrisome. However, gifts of cash, valuable items or special treatment given to one person or one particular group of people should be avoided. Consequences for not



Getting started might seem like a daunting task, but you don’t need to reinvent the wheel.

complying with the policy should be explained clearly so they are easily understood.

An association’s greatest asset is its membership. Asking for member input in crafting a strong and meaningful policy will give your members a chance to be listened to and recognized. If appropriate, a work group or a task force made up of knowledgeable association members can lead to policy that is both smart and comprehensive.

As always, NAR’s Member Policy team can help you with any questions you encounter along the way. You can reach us from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central, Monday through Friday, at 312-329-8399 or by email at narpolicyquestions@nar.realtor. ■



Daniel Doepke is director of member

policy at the National Association of REALTORS®.



Making Decisions about Employee Requests

It's a fine balance between wants and needs.

BY CAROLE KAPTUR



Quiet quitting. Yes, it's yet another new phenomenon since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employers are concerned about retaining their employees due to the Great Resignation. But we now learn that some who stay might just be quiet quitting.

The term is just as it sounds. It's quitting in place by being absent in the job while still present and accounted for. There but not really there. Doing the minimum and getting by. Constantly calling off work, to the point where an employee has a zero time-off balance.

Coupled with this, we have employees with a whole new set of expectations about work-life balance. They want remote options to reduce commuting costs or to accommodate a spouse's or partner's work schedule. Or they want the choice to leave early to take care of their kids or older parents.

It's a delicate balance between employee retention and achieving business goals, but which takes priority? We always want to say that the business takes priority. However, it can sometimes be the case that the employee's request should be strongly considered. It's somewhat of a seesaw, with employee needs and wants on one end and employer needs and wants on the other.

There's a difference between a need and a want, and that applies to both employees and employers. For either party, the need is a must-do, while the want is a nice-to-do. When everything is working well, the seesaw is in balance. However, sometimes the seesaw may lean more toward one direction than the other.

What are examples of employer needs? People who do their work, do their work well, use critical thinking skills, get along with others and actually show up. Examples of employer wants include employees who are passionate about the work, confident in their skills or good communicators.

On the flip side, employee needs include things like good pay, benefits, respect and honesty from the employer. Employee wants can vary from flexibility and purposeful work to consideration for personal circumstances and additional pay or benefits.

In deciding how to balance this seesaw, it could be helpful to use a twist on the old "pros and cons" list. Draw a square divided into quarters. Label one half at the top of



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the square with "employee" and the other half with "employer." Then label the individual squares on each side with "want" and "need." Start with needs first and list the actual needs of each party. Then move to the wants section. Doing so will help you make balanced decisions.

Remember that once you grant an employee's request, you have opened the door to what is called past practice. For a decision to be considered a past practice, it must occur repeatedly and have existed for some length of time. It also needs to be consistent. Problems can be caused when we treat one employee differently than others. In addition, it's possible under certain circumstances that granting one employee more flexibility than another employee can be viewed as compensation. We want to be mindful of treating employees equitably yet fairly and with compassion, because we are all human beings.



Remember that once you grant an employee's request, you have opened the door to what is called past practice.

In today's environment, it's important to keep in mind that we need to find a balance for this widely varying range of desires and workplace fundamentals. The world of work has changed, and so must our work cultures and our responses. ■



Carole Kaptur, SHRM-SCP, RCE, is a consultant in the National Association of REALTORS® Strategic Association Management Services, Talent Development and Resources group.



SMALL BOARD



Providing members with educational opportunities that can advance their careers in business is an integral part of what we do as an association and an important factor in member retention.

—Sabrina Brown, Madera Association of REALTORS®



MADERA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

A strong vision and detailed planning went into the Madera Association of REALTORS®' award-winning women's conference. **BY ANGELICA RAMIREZ**



When Sabrina Brown, education chair at the Madera Association of REALTORS®, learned about the Supporting Women of Real Estate grant offered by the National Association of REALTORS® and the Women's Council of REALTORS®, she saw an opportunity to discuss business leadership and member involvement with women in her central California community. She shared the vision with Madera's board of directors, which fully supported creating an event. That's how "Women Who Lead ~ Breaking the Glass Ceiling" was created.

Madera—which describes itself as "the largest little association in California"—would go on to be one of 10 REALTOR® associations awarded \$2,500 for creating new and innovative programs focused on advancing women in real estate. Last year, the grant specifically supported one-day conferences designed to inspire women to take on greater leadership roles in both business and organized real estate.

Women Who Lead, which took place Oct. 20, was an interactive workshop for women wanting to seek positions of leadership in the real estate industry, either within their brokerage or at the local, state or national association. The goal was to provide participants with tools and connections necessary to advance into leadership roles. As such, the workshop included mentor matchups, panel discussions and roundtable discussions. "Providing members with educational opportunities that can advance their careers in business is an integral part of what we do as an association and an important factor in member retention," says Brown.

The mentor matchups were a key part of the program, giving their members an opportunity to network with female panelists who could then help them set goals and develop a plan to advance in leadership. "Panelists were a diverse

group of women working as leaders at the local, state and national levels and who had different backgrounds and paths to leadership positions," says Brown. "Most of the panelists were involved in multiple leadership roles across different fields, not only real estate. We also placed an emphasis on how membership, and taking advantage of member benefits, helps individuals develop the skills necessary to become leaders."

Attendees told organizers that they appreciated the insight provided by a diverse panel of women with whom they could relate. Not only did the panelists share their success stories, but they also shared the struggles they faced on their way to obtaining leadership positions and how they overcame those struggles.

Another valuable takeaway: Members enjoy workshops that require them to participate. "While listening to speakers is a great way to learn, having member participation and encour-

aging dialogue between the speakers and the audience and among the attendees takes the experience to another level," says Brown.

The workshop exercises required attendees to break away from the group they arrived with to meet the panelists and other attendees, which kept them engaged and promoted networking.

"We look forward to putting together more events like this one in the future," says Brown. "Providing our members and our community with education that can help them advance in their careers is a key part of our mission as an association. We also want to continue to motivate women in our community and offer them an opportunity to make connections with individuals who can help them reach success." ■



Angelica Ramirez is the association executive for Madera Association of REALTORS® in California.



MIND OF THE MEMBER



The Failure of Virtual

Or, when did we forget how to communicate? **BY BOB TAYLOR**



collaboration, empathy, trust and synergy are all part of what workers get in a healthy live-work environment. Also, some effective management styles have grown around the ability to see workers face to face. All the above rely on team members communicating well with one another.

George Bernard Shaw reportedly said, “The greatest problem in communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished.” One of our own, Art Godi, CRB, CRS, a former instructor for the Certified Real Estate Brokerage Manager designation and 1996 National Association of REALTORS® president, once said, “The fault in communication usually lies with the sender, not the receiver.”

If virtual meetings and management are falling short in facilitating employee collaboration and synergy, is the problem the format or how it is being used? Only recently, while I was waiting to participate in a meeting virtually and sitting in a so-called “waiting room,” did the answer start to form.

Live Versus Virtual

How many of us have gone to a live meeting of any size and been unable to talk with others who were also attending, forced to wait until the exact moment the meeting began to say anything? Of course, the answer is never. What occurs as people are waiting for doors to open, looking for seating or sitting is that you chat. If you are strangers, there are introductions, and if you are sitting with people you know, you ask questions that are either personal or business-

related. While sometimes you wish you could mute someone else in the room, you usually cannot.

Yet as I attended my first virtual meeting, there I sat, unable to talk to those I knew who were attending or those for whom introductions were required. This raises the question: Is it the failure of this meeting style, the format or how it is managed?

What is interesting is that even when a waiting room is not employed, too often all participants are muted, requiring them to use chat—if it has not been disabled. While this might seem a far more manageable way to run

a virtual meeting, it is the opposite of the live meeting format we claim to want. It is also noteworthy that many people who in a live meeting are “social butterflies” sit like wallflowers in a virtual meeting before it starts.

In-office Collaboration and Synergy

The ability of co-workers to communicate with each other in a trusted and safe environment is a critical component of collaboration and synergy. Good management should not be in the form of “shepherd and sheep,” which flies in the face of the “collaboration and



HARDWARE

Virtual Tech Options

Multiple platforms are available for remote and hybrid meetings, with Zoom, Webex and Microsoft Teams being the three most common. Depending on your needs, all can be used almost regardless of budget. The hardware remains the more difficult problem.

Few one-price-fits-all solutions exist when it comes to hardware at a favorable cost. Consequently, piecing a system together is usually required. Too often, the video feed is OK and the audio poor. Focus on audio first, and then select a quality video system. It is far better to hear others clearly than to see them while struggling to hear them. Grosse Pointe Board of REALTORS® repurposed an existing computer and invested \$5,000 on a Stem wall-mounted sound bar and microphones for audio, a Logitech Rally camera, a 55-inch 4K HD television and a second computer.

synergy” managers claim they want to accomplish.

Meanwhile, our members work in a business environment with a unique benchmark. Their income is directly dependent on their responsiveness when a client or potential client reaches out to them. It is this responsiveness that they, in turn, expect when they reach out to their association, hoping to talk to someone who can resolve their question. It is also why associations that get out in front of the agent—without getting in the way—are valued by members.

Time is our members’ most valuable commodity.

This may help to explain that as much as they might have wished to return to conducting business in person when meeting restrictions were lifted, when it came to association-related business, this was only the case until it came time to get into the car.

As a result, our association’s governance-related meetings have remained virtual. However, hybrid options remain for educational programming, while our 36 annual networking events are in-person only.

Best of Both Worlds

So, what does this all mean when it comes to virtual

meetings? Even as members want our help in saving them time, we have to also stay focused on “collaboration and synergy” in the process.

When it comes to virtual, here are some valuable takeaways:

- Let attendees interact with each other by disabling waiting rooms and opening the meeting early.
- Let members know how you will be running the meeting, which will require members not speaking to be on mute and those wishing to speak to “raise hand.”
- Whoever is running the meeting reserves

the right to “mute all” if the rules are not followed or the conversation takes an inappropriate turn.

The best practice when it comes to virtual? Be an “old dog” that can learn “new tricks.” When you embrace methods that save members’ time and promote great communication, that is when your association will shine. ■



Bob Taylor, RCE, is CEO of the Grosse

Pointe Board of REALTORS® in Michigan.



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Member Champion

Bay East Association of REALTORS® CEO Tricia Thomas aims to delight members.

cating the promise of delight, listening to how members define exceptional experiences, ensuring services and behaviors align with your promise, measuring the success of your actions and creating accountability. Then, make that promise your brand—demonstrating who you are, what you stand for and how you will treat members and the community.

Q: What should associations avoid doing in terms of member experience?

“I’m so glad I got the automated phone directory when I called,” said no one, ever. Every point of contact with your members is an opportunity for a great or a gruesome experience. Evaluate your processes and practices to determine if you’re compromising high touch for high tech.

Tricia Thomas, RCE, has this goal as CEO: “To create an organizational culture that is focused on delighting those we serve by providing an exceptional experience.” Thomas, often described as an expert on the member experience, offers her take on what engages members—and herself as CEO.

Q: Tricia, how can associations cultivate loyal members?

A concise, memorable mission statement is the foundation for building a culture laser-focused on providing an exceptional experience. If you don’t have a culture statement, make it a priority to create one in 2023. Then, being a successful organization boils down to four simple principles of culture: Create it. State it. Share it. Do it.

Q: What’s one easy way to amp up the member experience?

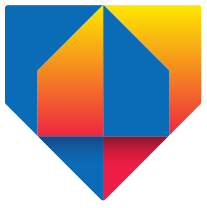
Creating great member experiences isn’t a single action. It’s a collaborative process that’s tied into the culture you create, and staff and leadership should align around it. It centers around all stakeholders committing to communi-

Q: How do you pitch your value to prospective members?

In the San Francisco Bay Area, REALTORS® can move easily between associations and MLSs. Our NAR jurisdiction touches on six associations and five MLSs, with 35% of our members coming from those areas. Because we share so many collaborations with our neighboring associations, we don’t market our services to prospective members because we don’t want to poach. We do, however, actively engage with our broker community to keep them advised on industry trends and association services. It’s the brokers who advise their agents on which association to join.

Q: What’s the single most important thing that engages and inspires you as an association executive?

Being part of a chorus of diverse voices, singing from the same songbook, making great music—that’s what engages and inspires me. It keeps us focused on our mission, and it means we don’t get bogged down in drama. That leaves room for collaborations, innovation and leadership development. ●



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