

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2007



The Executive

California Society of Association Executives

CaSAE

A PUBLICATION OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

MEMBER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION



**From Database
Doldrums to
Database Dynamics**

Drive to Succeed
*Tips & Tricks to Triumphant
Membership Drives*

**Involve Your Leaders
to Increase Retention**

**Who Are Your
Nonmembers ...
And Why?**

Volunteer Leadership
*A Primer for Those
Considering to
Get More Involved*



© iStockphoto.com/Jacobi Wickathausen

Involve Your Leaders to Increase Retention

If “building community” throughout your association is important to achieving your goals, then consider making councils a part of your structure – the positives are limitless.

Recently, the Building Industry Association of Southern California (BIA/SC) began using the theme “Building Strength Through Association” to remind members that they are part of a very large and influential organization. That theme has never been more important than right now, as the residential construction industry experiences a significant slowdown.

As an organization, we had to re-evaluate our strategies to retain members during a time when member companies were faced with considerable budgetary issues. The question put to our Membership Committee by our board and leaders was: “Are members going to retain their membership or go elsewhere for their networking and marketing needs?”

We were not surprised or caught flat-footed by the market slowdown. We had read the tea leaves and seen this coming for quite some time. There were signs of a slowdown as early as 2005, and the market abruptly changed in the middle of 2006.

Now, with the combination of a consumer credit crunch and less disposable income for the average American family, home sales have cooled dramatically. Knowing that this was coming, we increased our efforts to get members fully

engaged at all levels to make their membership invaluable.

How did we accomplish this? The BIA/SC has 12 niche councils that serve particular segments of the industry. We regularly touch new home sales and marketing people, union contractors, women in the industry and many other sub-groups. We do this by offering some fantastic marketing and networking opportunities through the different councils.

Recognition can keep them coming back. One of the most successful retention tools for BIA/SC is a series of very prominent award programs that can only be entered and won if the entrant is employed by a member company. These awards are coveted, and the competition is stiff. The various categories honor a wide array of topics from “Best Sales Associate” all the way up to “Best New Home Community.”

A Sample of Performance Standards for Councils

Because Councils are chartered by the parent organization, each Council is expected to perform a minimum level of service to the members and adhere to all of the Bylaws of the organization. The Council should agree to the following minimum standard of performance:

- **Leadership officers (volunteers):** Each Council shall have at least a President, one Vice President, and a Secretary/Treasurer.
- **Council Board:** The business of the Council shall be conducted by a Board of Directors. The Council Board of Directors elected for a one-year or two-year terms; have a quorum of 50 percent or more members of the Board to conduct business; and have job descriptions for Board Members, Code of Ethics, Confidentiality Policy; and Consent to Serve & Commitment to Pledge forms signed by all leaders.
- **Committees (made up of volunteers):** All Councils offer some level of programs to their members; therefore, The Council shall establish at least the following standing committees: Executive, Membership, Finance and Nominating. These committees should be clearly defined in the Council operating procedures.
- **Meetings:** The frequency, time and location of Council Meetings will be determined by the Council Board of Directors.
- **Council name:** The official name of each Council shall contain the words "Council" and the official name of the parent organization.
- **Budgeting and financial review:** The Council shall maintain an independent budget to operate its own affairs and shall balance its budget at the beginning of every quarter of the fiscal year. If the Council Board determines that there will be an operating deficit, it shall notify the organization's Chief Executive Officer, immediately.

- **Board of Director minutes and financial reports:** The Council shall take and submit minutes of all Board meetings and financial reports within five working days after they have been approved to the parent organization.
- **Membership:** A plan for welcoming new members must be in place (this might include a welcome packet or letter; personal call from the leadership; etc.).
- **Education/Networking:** A minimum of six educational or networking offerings must be presented throughout the year. Suggestions include, but are not limited to: regular breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings; other social events; or co-sponsored opportunities with the parent organization.
- **Parent organization involvement:** Council Presidents and officers are encouraged to attend all Board meetings of the parent organization.

You can imagine how important winning these awards can be to homebuilders in a fiercely competitive market. In effect, we have created our own best-of-the-best awards program and, much like winning a J.D. Powers customer service award, these are highly sought-after. Clearly, by leveraging our council members to enter award programs, we have the necessary book to keep the member company. To say the least, peer recognition equals membership retention.

Networking with like-minded professionals is crucial in an industry that is as vast as homebuilding. Another example of a council that offers unique opportunities is the Customer Service Builders Council. This council provides builders an opportunity to send their customer service teams to monthly luncheons where attendees share and discuss pertinent information.

In California, there are dozens of laws aimed at protecting consumers when they purchase new homes. The first line of defense for the homebuilder is the customer service representative. From urban high-rise issues to water intrusion, best practices are brought forth and shared among all of the members of this council. Members in this council feel that it provides a great sup-

port group for them, especially since constant interaction with angry customers can be demoralizing.

Networking in this council provides them an outlet for that frustration. We frequently notice at these luncheons a "team pride" spirit, which is a positive benefit for the members. Building companies send these employees to monthly luncheons, and they return to work with renewed vigor. It has been our experience that, when it comes time for the member company to decide whether to renew its membership, these customer service representatives fight to preserve the relationship and encourage the decision makers at the top to renew the company membership.

What's the message here? As association professionals, we must find ways to engage our members at all levels. If your organization does not have a niche-market structure to address the needs of particular members, consider developing one. This option within our membership has been tremendously helpful for retention and can be duplicated in almost any professional organization. There are subgroups in every facet of business, and there are plenty of companies that would like to have access to those groups through sponsorships or other forms of exposure.

Don't miss the opportunity to form unique councils (some organizations call them "chapters," "committees" or "divisions") within your organization. If "building community" throughout your association is important to achieving your goals, then consider making councils a part of your structure – the positives are limitless. Your bylaws might require you to adjust or adapt them to meet the needs of a subgroup, but don't let that stop you. If you are concerned that a subgroup might take your good name and usurp the voice of the organization, then you should establish minimum standards. All of these points are valid but should not be obstacles to your success. For sample "minimum standards of conduct," see the insert on this page.

For more information about the 12 industry councils within BIA/SC, please visit www.bia/sc.org or call Patu Nearhoff, director of councils and education, at 909-396-9993.

Mlyson Austin is Vice President of Member Services and Patu Nearhoff is Director of Councils and Education, both for BIA/SC. They can be reached at maustin@bia.sc.org or pnearhoff@bia.sc.org.