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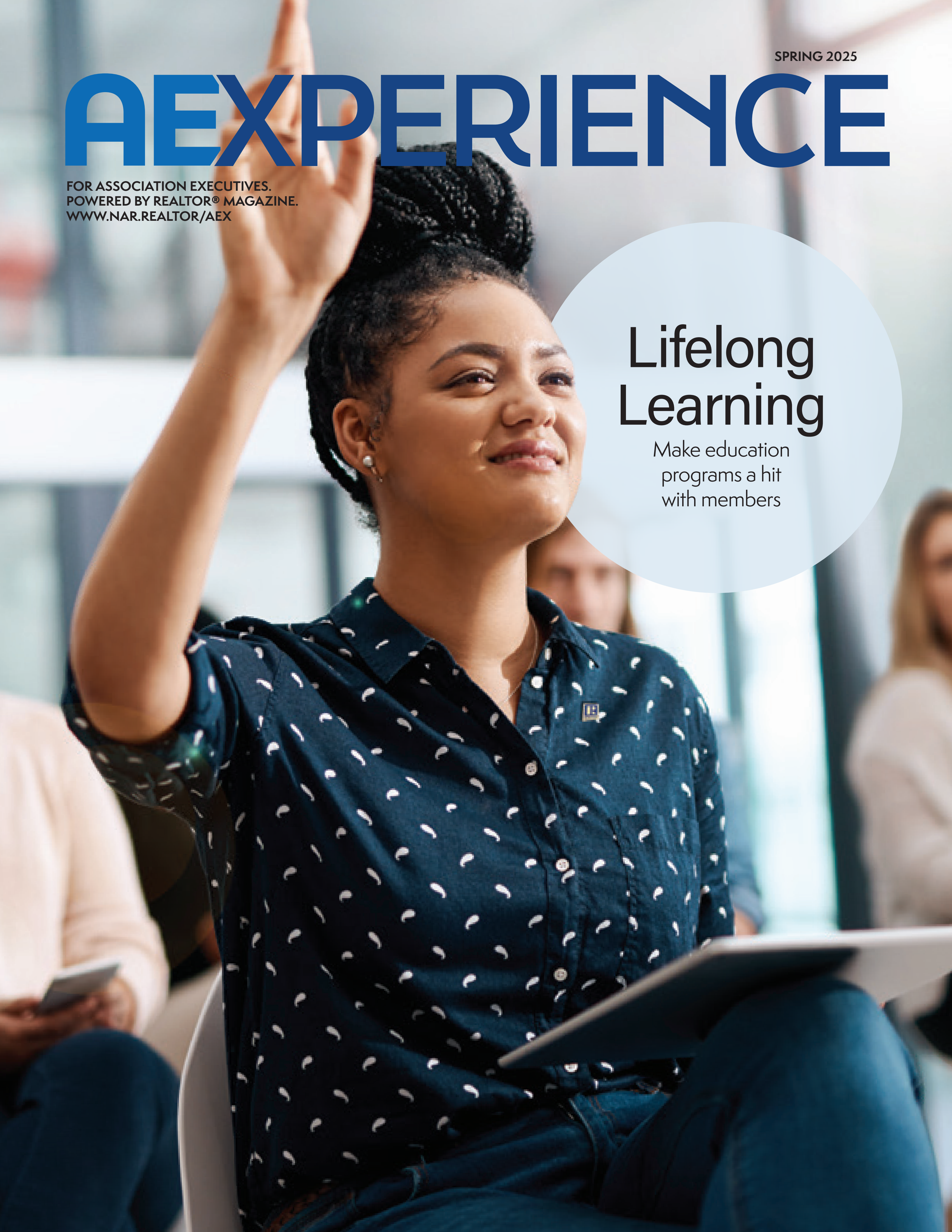

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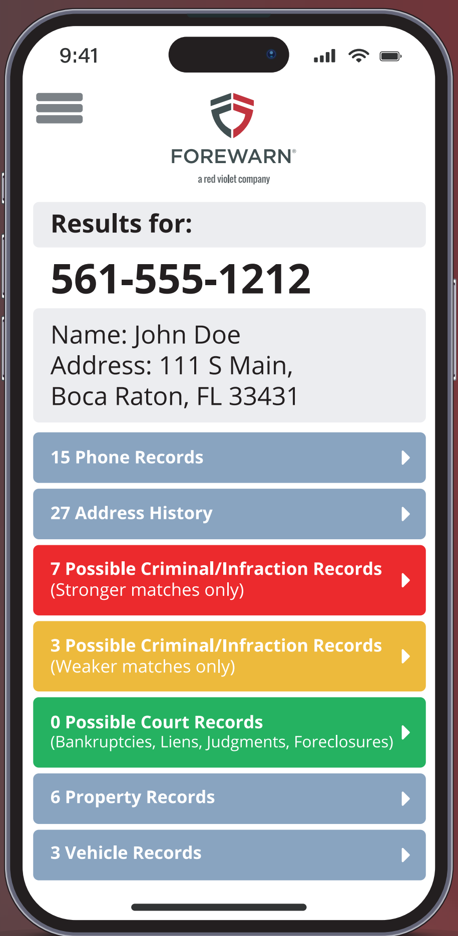

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> — **John Gormley**, CEO
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SPRING 2025
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ON THE WEB

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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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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® OFFICIAL PUBLICATION

AEC CHAIR

Let's Learn Together

Tricia Thomas, RCE, CEO, Bay East Association of REALTORS®

Professional development and education are at the core of thriving associations. Did you know more than 80% of associations offer these programs as part of their member value, according to the American Society of Association Executives? Professional development is key to our members' success, but it's just as important for us as association executives. Lifelong learning isn't just a nice perk or a tool; it's something we need for personal growth and to help our associations succeed. For AEs, it's the foundation of strong, impactful leadership.

We can better guide our organizations by keeping up with training, connecting with peers and staying on top of industry changes. These practices are how we create programs that don't just check a box. They give our members the skills to tackle challenges and succeed in an ever-changing market.

Another important part of our role is helping the board of directors understand why staff development is a great investment. You can share real-life examples of how training has improved member services or streamlined operations. It's important to show that supporting staff growth isn't just an expense—it drives long-term success and innovation. When people are encouraged to stretch their skills and potential, it makes them stronger contributors. And a confident, well-trained team directly boosts member satisfaction and helps the association run more smoothly.

At the end of the day, professional development—for ourselves and our teams—is what empowers us to lead with confidence. When we prioritize learning for our members, our staff and ourselves, we help our associations stay relevant, innovative and prepared to tackle whatever comes next.

Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities to support this growth. The National Association of REALTORS® offers timely resources, skill-building programs and invaluable networking events throughout the year. I'm excited to make the most of these opportunities in 2025, and I hope you'll join me in connecting with the AE community as we exchange ideas, learn together and continue growing.

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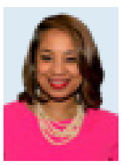
AOR IN ACTION

NEWS AND IDEAS FROM YOUR PEERS

5 TIPS

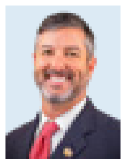
Going Global

Creating a global council at your association is a great tool for member attraction and retention, supports diverse communities and provides members with another channel for business growth and success (think $42 billion—the total invested by international buyers in 2024). Not sure how to get started? Five association executives share their best advice.

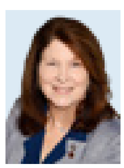


1. Survey your members. "We shaped our annual comprehensive membership survey to test out the appetite of our members for international real estate," says Jessica Coates, RCE, CEO, Sacramento Association of REALTORS® in California. "We found that a large percentage wanted to expand their business but lacked the knowledge and allowed cultural barriers to interfere. This presented many opportunities for a global business council."

2. Offer designations. "At Mainstreet REALTORS®, we're proud to be a Diamond Global Business Council, the highest level of achievement NAR bestows," says John Gormley, RCE, CAE, CEO, Mainstreet REALTORS®, Downers Grove, Ill. "We started our program more than a decade ago. To get started, I highly recommend offering the CIPS, Certified International Property Specialist, designation. It brings a broad knowledge of global real estate opportunities to your members and a built-in referral network."



3. Partner with like-minded agencies, such as other associations, business development groups, local cultural organizations and even international events. "The Ohio REALTORS® Global Business Alliance has strengthened its partnership with JobsOhio, leveraging their expertise to attract international investment and highlight Ohio as a prime destination for global business opportunities," says Scott Williams, RCE, AHWD, CEO, Ohio REALTORS®. "This collaboration has allowed us to showcase the state's thriving economy, diverse industries and growing real estate market to potential investors worldwide."



4. Consider committee structure and leadership. "We have four work groups to handle different aspects," says Lisia Amburn, RCE, C2EX, CEO, High Point Regional Association of REALTORS® in North Carolina. "Education & Outreach [to handle] workshops and training sessions on cultural awareness, communication styles and business etiquette across different cultures; Concierge to establish a database of businesses in the community that are experienced or offer services to different cultures or languages; Trade Missions & MOUs to look at the feasibility of trade missions and memorandums of understanding with different countries; and Branding, for setting up the global website, logos, social media, etc."

Sacramento Association of REALTORS® Global Business Council

5. Talk it up and create new opportunities. "News media outlets worldwide are eager to cover the activities of global councils," says Lynda Fernandez, RCE, CAE, CEO, Hudson Gateway Association of REALTORS®, White Plains, N.Y. "Not only does the coverage elevate the organization's brand recognition and [search engine optimization], but it also brings further opportunities for partnerships and collaborations when other global associations, economic development entities and universities read the coverage of your organization's work in their markets. It positions the association as a leading driver in economic development and source of global statistics and other information. My association has generated coverage in *The Economist*, CNN U.S. and International, and many other international TV, radio, digital and print media."

"The resources and hands-on help we've received from NAR's staff has been fundamental. They were able to visit and help us shape the council's strategic goals for the year."

—Jessica Coates, RCE, CEO, Sacramento Association of REALTORS®

Ready to get started on your global journey? Reach out to Alejandro Escudero, NAR director of global strategy, aescudero@nar.realtor.

SCCAR's Modern Real Estate Professional group attracts agents and brokers of all ages.

CLASSES

A New Idea for New Agent Training

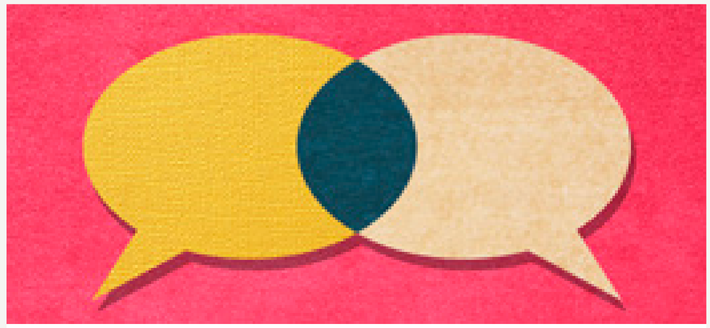
With a growing number of seasoned professionals making a career change to become real estate agents and brokers, Santa Cruz County Association of REALTORS® wanted to try something a little different when it launched its new agent boot camp for members in 2024.

These types of classes are usually geared toward young professionals. But CEO Kathy Hartman, RCE, says the association wanted to appeal to a variety of age groups. "We like to try different ideas or put a different spin on education and marketing to our membership," Hartman says. "While we don't have a 'Young Professionals Group,' we do have a 'Modern Real Estate Professional' for any newer member. We wanted everyone to feel included, and it works for us. MREP is one of our largest committees that does quarterly events/education."

The Agent Boot Camp Training Series is free for anyone who has attended new member orientation within the past year. For everyone else, it's $110 for the full series or $30 per class. Held in February and again in September, the series covers five essential topics: Business Planning, Fundamentals of Loans, Working with Buyers, Working with Sellers, and Disclosures and Contracts. Instructors are highly experienced association members who volunteer their services.

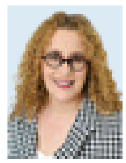
What's attracted agents of all ages and experience levels, Hartman says, is the opportunity to build new skills or refresh existing ones, all in a single month. In 2024, about 25 members attended each session—"and we are optimistic that attendance will grow in 2025 as more members experience the value of this training," Hartman says. "We believe that the better educated our members are, the greater their chances of achieving professional success."

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®.



GOOD TALK

Critical Communications



Whether engaging with members, leading a planning meeting or guiding someone through professional development, you likely have left an important conversation thinking about how it could have gone better or how you could have said something differently. You replay the conversation over and over in your head, sometimes at 3 a.m.! Try this next time for better communication:

1. **Do the work before the work.** People don't wake up one day and successfully run a marathon. It takes planning, practice and preparation. Communication is similar. It's important to think about the conversations you'll have, whether in person or online. Which ones are crucial, where you have a deep interest in the outcome? What objections do you anticipate hearing, if any? Which conversations have you had that you might be able to revisit?

   For example, if you are preparing to lead an educational seminar, think about the "what if" scenarios ahead of time and how you might respond.
2. **Reverse the situation.** If you are ever wondering what to say or share, online or in person, switch the situation and imagine if someone were saying the same thing to you. How would you react? Of course, not everyone reacts the same way, but it's a good place to start.

   For example, say you're leading a meeting and you keep monopolizing the conversation. Flip that around and consider how you'd feel as a listener.
3. **Don't rush.** Did you know that if you plant asparagus it takes quite a while to sprout, but once it does, you can harvest it for years? Similarly, building trust takes time. You can't rush a relationship, but once you have a strong one, it can provide results for a long time. This is true when networking with a colleague, a member or a potential partner. Once trust is there, amazing things can happen.

So, use the fact that curiosity is the fuel for conversation and ask honest questions to gain context and understanding. That will lead to empathy and trust. These conversations will lead to relationships, and those relationships will lead to opportunities.

Beth Granger is a consultant, speaker and Exactly What to Say certified guide who works with individuals, business leaders and organizations to take them from confused to confident when networking, building their business, and having more effective critical conversations. She can be found at bethgranger.com and linkedin.com/in/bethgranger.

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FRESH IDEA

For Classes, Think Way Outside the Box

Are your members yawning over the same old educational courses and networking events—and are your numbers showing it? Attendance numbers were down at Portland Metropolitan Association of REALTORS® in Oregon, which is why Bianca McCarthy, PMAR's events manager, went back to the drawing board. "It didn't make sense to keep investing in expensive speakers for each event," she says. "So, I worked with my committee to seek out pertinent topics that also were budget friendly."

One committee member suggested architectural styles in Portland. Although it was out of the box, the topic fit perfectly under the umbrella of property evaluation/valuation. "It helps to educate [members] on inherent characteristics of a style so they can work with their clients on listing accurately or finding homes that fit a certain style and knowing what to expect from a home of that style," McCarthy says.

That first class led to additional classes offering a deeper dive into styles that members, through post-class surveys, said they wanted to learn more about. The speaker, an architect from a local firm, also came at the right price: She asked only for a one-time contact with attendees after the event to provide the slide deck.

The class attracts about 86 members on average. Attendees offer feedback such as: "Very on point, knowledgeable and great sense of humor. It was the best event I have attended this year."

Thinking outside the box can be challenging. But serving on committees and supporting the NAR Young Professionals Network brings new ideas for potential topics and unique ways to provide educational content, McCarthy says.

One more tip: For post-event surveys, always ask at least one open-ended question seeking suggestions for topics and speakers.

Arciform's Stephyn Meiner talks up midcentury design during a PMAR class.

TOP OF THE CLASS

Get Smarter About Money

Planning for your financial future is something everyone should do. You, your staff and your members can all benefit from a complimentary National Association of REALTORS® resource, the Center for REALTOR® Financial Wellness. It's packed with tools to help you assess your current financial profile, set personalized financial planning goals, understand tax rules and explore a library of resources, including webinars.

financialwellness.realtor

Artificial intelligence is all the rage in communications. I'm wondering: Can we use AI for education and professional development?

Oklahoma REALTORS® is one association that, like many, has played with ChatGPT, DALL-E and similar platforms. While much of its investigation has been around augmenting its communication activities, the association has explored using AI to revamp its state leadership program, LeadershipOAR.

While CEO Bryan (Hutch) Hutchinson, RCE, CAE, says it's a little too early to predict what the outcomes will be, he shares this example of how the association has used AI for education: "In a recent education presentation, the instructor took the parameters of the course and wrote the outline in the traditional format that we use. We took the same parameters and ran them through ChatGPT, wanting to see what connections machine learning has made that were similar and that were dissimilar. In this instance, what the instructor was hoping to communicate was significantly different from the result of ChatGPT." In the end, none of the AI data was used.

"My advice to other associations right now: Do not get lazy and rely on AI. Vet the results and prove that it is working," says Hutchinson, who's pragmatic about adopting AI only when it seems effective for strategic operations.

THE WRITE WORDS

How to Create a Great Course Title

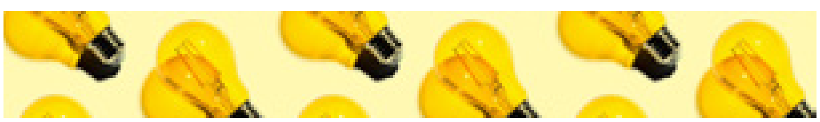
Imagine if *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* had instead been titled *A Boy With a Red Rock.*

Which would you rather read?

When you're planning educational courses for your members, keep in mind that titles are important. Titles that are too generic, too long or unmemorable may make your course fall flat. Here's a quick primer to creating titles that draw people in:

- **Think about what makes your course special.** Instead of "Contracts for 2025," for example, consider "2025 Contracts Update: What's In, What's Out and Why?" (from Georgia REALTORS®).
- **Add puns, wordplay or jokes.** For example, instead of "A Spotlight on Assistance Animals," consider "Is That Pony a Pet? Understanding Assistance Animals" (from New York State Association of REALTORS®).
- **Make sure your clever title promotes your content.** For example, consider "Start Me Up: New Agent Bundle" (from California Association of REALTORS®).
- **Test it!** Once you have a couple of options, ask a focus group which title it prefers. Or you could promote the class with two titles and see which gets the most clicks or signups.
- **Ask yourself a question.** Would you sign up for that course? If not, rework the title and make sure it packs a punch.

Adapted from "How to Write a Great Course Title" by Rahul Mehta on FreshLearn, freshlearn.com/blog/good-course-titles.



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QUICK TIP

Don't Just Educate—Engage

Next time you offer a class, don't end it after the presentation. Engage attendees by breaking them up into small groups to think through scenarios and apply what they've just heard. This not only reinforces learning but invites them to network and bond. Also consider this: The more that members get to talk about their pain points and the more questions and answers they get from other members and staff, the more engaged and heard they will feel.

Adapted from "Encouraging Member Engagement Through Education," asaecenter.org/resources/articles/an_plus/2018/june/encouraging-member-engagement-through-education.

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RURAL OUTREACH

Tackling Water Safety for Members and Communities

When Hurricane Helene swept through western North Carolina last September, it left safe water sources severely compromised. Half a year later, the City of Asheville is still pumping chlorine into its system, and some homeowners with private wells may need to access testing to confirm the safety and drinkability of their water. With support from the REALTOR® Party's Rural Outreach Grant program, the Land of the Sky Association of REALTORS® has been able to provide guidance and water test kits to its members.

Matthew Allen, LOTSAR's director of professional development and government affairs, learned about the grant at NAR NXT: The REALTOR® Experience shortly after the disaster. "Rural properties in our region were hit especially hard by flooding and landslides," he says. "We applied [for the funding] right away and were able to hold a forum on post-hurricane water safety issues within about a month. The grant also enabled us to buy water-testing kits that we distributed to the roughly 40 members who attended; the rest we offered to our membership while supplies lasted."

At the forum, local experts shared guidance on post-hurricane safety issues and legal topics such as changed property lines and easements, and material fact disclosures. "The inspector and plumber did a great job of sharing their knowledge about turbidity levels, which, at the time, were testing higher than acceptable by World Health Organization standards," Allen says. "In addition to concerns about E. coli, they covered the issue of high lead levels, as there were concerns that lead-based paint had been dredged up by the storm."

In addition to the consumer-grade water test kits, LOTSAR received a grant from the North Carolina Association of REALTORS® that enabled them to offer professional testing to at least 15 attendees.

LOTSAR plans to offer a similar program again this year, bringing in additional experts.

Learn How to Apply

On June 17, NAR will offer a webinar outlining how to apply for the Rural Outreach Grant, which is open for applications until Oct. 15, or until commitment levels reach 100%.

nar.realtor/rural-outreach-grant

AOR IN ACTION
NEWS AND IDEAS FROM YOUR PEERS

DISASTER RESPONSE

In the Wake of Wildfires

On the morning of Jan. 7, an enormous, dark column of smoke appeared in the blue skies above Malibu, Calif.

It was just the first sign of what would grow into one of several wildfires consuming thousands of acres—eventually destroying 16,000 homes, businesses and other structures and killing 29 people.

For REALTOR® associations in California, it was also time to swing into action. "Most of us had received evacuation orders the evening of the seventh and early hours of the eighth," says Rian Barrett, CEO of Pasadena Foothills Association of REALTORS®, whose staff and members were affected by the Altadena and Eaton Canyon fires. Leadership and staff who were safe and able "went into remote work so that we would be available to anyone needing PFAR resources."

That work included:

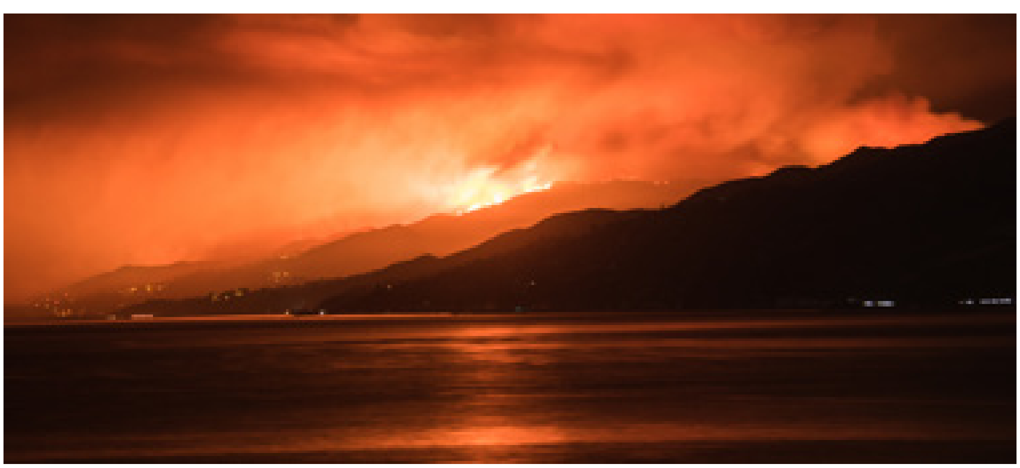
- Updating the PFAR board twice a day with new information and providing debriefs
- Starting a resource page on the PFAR website and sharing updates through social media and email
- Compiling a list of staff and members who lost homes or had uninhabitable homes, which began with 20 and quickly grew to 70
- Calling each member to check in and providing information on the California Association of REALTORS® Disaster Relief Fund as a resource

Other local associations also joined in the effort. "A few association executives put out a request for a 'cash not crap' fundraiser to all the California AORs," says Barrett. "We used our 501(c)3 to hold any funds received and purchased gift cards to give out to anyone impacted by fires, first to members and then to the community at large."

PFAR would go on to create a resource center where member volunteers used their knowledge to share information on available housing. They also handed out food, clothing and other necessities, collaborating with local government. Barrett says they helped more than 75 families in the first 17 days of running the resource center, "disbursing resources and gift cards to our members and the community."

As of April 14, Barrett says PFAR has helped support 62 members and their families, "but we learn of new ones every day." Among others, both PFAR President Lynnette West-Cater and her mother lost their homes; association secretary Hazel Perera was one of three families in her neighborhood affected as the fire jumped and moved in an unexpected pattern; and the Shakoor family, which includes 16 people and two generations of real estate professionals, lost multiple homes and two business offices.

Fires were fully contained as of the end of January. But PFAR and other associations' work isn't done. In the aftermath, with so much rebuilding to be done, says Barrett, "we're working to create legislation and partner with the cities to expand our reach."



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Associations Rally for Relief

In the wake of the devastating Los Angeles-area fires, California associations and others across the U.S. have banded together to offer support to members who lost homes, businesses and more:

- California Association of REALTORS® contributed $300,000 to its own Disaster Relief Fund and another $300,000 to the national REALTORS® Relief Foundation.
- California Desert Association of REALTORS® in Palm Desert raised $445 for RRF during the recent installation of its new board.
- Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS® contributed $20,000 to RRF.
- San Francisco Association of REALTORS® asked its members to donate to victims and first responders and matched donations up to $10,000.
- RRF itself approved a $1.5 million grant for disaster relief in the state.

Education

BY THOMAS A. BARSTOW

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Over the past two years, Diana Colin has built a robust education program for the Portland Metropolitan Association of REALTORS® in Oregon.

As PMAR's professional standards administrator, she oversees continuing education and professional development for the association's roughly 7,500 members. PMAR gave Colin an open playbook to develop educational opportunities. She started by attending national conferences, where she networked with those who excel at CE and training. She also learned ways to identify good speakers and instructors.

Her approach to training involves a sense of curiosity, always seeking out the members and leaders within PMAR's ranks to ask what they need and want, while monitoring industry trends. Her networking—honed by about 30 years in the real estate industry—has been more productive than surveys or polls.

That sense of curiosity and a willingness to try new strategies is a key component of successful education programs for REALTOR® associations seeking to offer classes that members are eager to sign up for and actually attend.

Start by Listening

Colin says she monitors professional Facebook feeds to see what members and others in the real estate industry are discussing. "I used to do surveys, but I don't want to flood inboxes. And I also found that surveys weren't all that helpful after presentations. I keep my ears open. I get more information from listening."

Her interactions have led her to pull together panels and webinars on topics such as cybersecurity, social media, compensation rules, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

While Colin has found more success in networking, other associations may find value in surveying their members to design the kind of education they want and need.

To enhance communication, Whidbey Island Association of REALTORS® in Washington state uses Constant Contact's digital and email marketing services for its newsletters. For a small fee, users can access a survey function.

The association's recently formed Education/Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Committee conducted a survey that included questions around members' preferences for CE classes, lunch-and-learns and webinars. That effort garnered very specific ideas; for example, respondents requested more forums that address land-use issues. As a result, the committee has been working with an instruc-

These creative strategies are helping associations devise classes that members are eager to sign up for—and actually attend.

Their Way

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tor from the state association to offer a CE class on shoreline and water rights.

Survey respondents also expressed a desire to hear more from affiliate members about their businesses and areas of expertise, Association Executive Paige Bates says. Because of limited sponsorship opportunities each year, the Education/DEIA Committee is developing a program for affiliate members that would give them up to 30 minutes to promote their business through an online seminar.

"We will promote the webinar on our YouTube channel, website, newsletter and social media," Bates says, and the first ran in early March. "It will allow us to fill in those months where we are not offering a CE or other type of virtual or in-person class."

The Howard County Association of REALTORS® in Maryland has also seen an increase in affiliate members willing to create and teach classes at no cost to the association. "This not only saves us money, but it's a value add for our affiliates who want to get in front of [our members]," says CEO Sarah Rayne, RCE, CAE.

Associations should consult with an attorney to ensure such activities are compliant with the Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act (RESPA).

Consider the Timing

Association leaders note that as members' needs evolve, the association's education offerings have to adapt.

"Our industry is changing. A lot of our members are dual career or at least start out as dual career until they become established and are able to support themselves with their real estate businesses alone," Rayne says. "If we don't change with the members, we will become irrelevant."

That means CE classes often run at night on Zoom. Attendance has been solid, but night classes also create some challenges. "While we try to offer as much nighttime virtual CE as possible, we run into the difficulty of finding instructors and staff members who are available at night," Rayne says. "We are working to identify solutions—flex time for staff, possibly a part-time employee who can run our nighttime classes and so on."

HCAR serves up required classes, such as for license renewal, but also offers unique topics, such as stigmatized properties, wills and estates, and solar energy. "It's all about meeting our members where they are," Rayne says. That includes offering classes whenever members have the time.

Colin prefers online educational forums because PMAR's members are spread throughout the Portland metropolitan region. Members are busy, and they get plenty of other opportunities to network through social gatherings developed by PMAR's events team, she adds.

"I determined that virtual is the best way to go, and the feedback on that has been good," Colin says. "When our members are looking for education, they want to sit at the computer and get it done. They want it to be quality, and they want to have it be worth their time, but they don't want to travel."

She recommends keeping the classes to one to two hours. "One hour is best, and two hours is a lot more commitment," Colin explains. "With three hours, it better be some really great content. And then you need to build in a break so people can make or take calls."

By member request, Whidbey Island Association of REALTORS® leverages the business knowledge of its affiliates for some of its member education.

Lean on State Resources

HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in northern Illinois has a branch-licensed school through Illinois REALTORS®. It partners with The CE Shop to offer self-paced home-study education online. That partnership offers a share of the revenue from the classes.

"Through that partnership, we offer CE and pre-license for real estate brokers and managing brokers, as well as appraisers and lenders," AE Heather Wiedrich, RCE, C2EX, says. Members who cannot attend the scheduled virtual classes have an option to learn the lessons on demand.

Like HomeTown, the Tacoma Pierce County Association of REALTORS® in Washington state, works with the state association to offer CE training. AE Sean Martin says Washington REALTORS®' programs are a great service because TPCAR doesn't have the capacity to offer the CE that meets state requirements.

For other smaller associations, it can also be more efficient to use those resources rather than build their own seminars. The local boards can work with the bigger associations to get a deal for their members and then heavily promote the classes to stimulate attendance.

"The state programs make it easy for us to coordinate and book CE with confidence and set things up for our members to provide the education that we know is going to be of value to them," Martin says.

Members can also log onto TPCAR's website and find numerous training opportunities provided by OnlineEd, including courses in real estate, mortgages, appraisals, career enhancement, and human resources training and compliance.

"They can take all sorts of classes through OnlineEd," Martin says about TPCAR's nearly 1,800 members. "Of all the stuff we have done over the past few years as far as member benefits, people overwhelmingly love it."

Colin also taps the resources of the state and national real estate groups, realizing that it can be more efficient to use those resources rather than build her own seminars.

Wiedrich adds that state associations are not the only resource available. To develop some of its virtual CE and professional development sessions, HomeTown Association of REALTORS® has collaborated with other local associations in Oak Park, Peru and Quincy, Ill.

"Our industry is *changing*.... If we don't change with the members, we will become *irrelevant*."

–Sarah Rayne, RCE, CAE

Get Them to Show Up

Attentiveness is a must. HCAR has had problems with members who don't follow the strict

HOWARD COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Howard County Association of REALTORS® has found success offering classes at times when members say they are most available.

class participation guidelines stipulated by the state real estate commission for virtual CE.

"All class participants must keep their cameras on and stay engaged. They cannot drive or do any other activity during the class," Rayne says. "It can be challenging sometimes for staff to enforce the rules and sometimes deliver the difficult news that a member is not receiving credit because they did not follow the guidelines, despite being reminded throughout the class by staff."

Likewise, PMAR has found that people often will not show up for free seminars, even though they registered in advance. However, when there's a small fee, people usually understand that there is a cost to putting on an online seminar and are more likely to attend.

"They have a little more skin in the game," Colin says. "When it is free, we get lots of registrations but only half show up. It is almost to their benefit to charge them a little bit."

HCAR limits the number of members in its classes due to classroom capacity and regulations surrounding online CE, Rayne says. "So, if members sign up for a class and they don't show up, they are using a seat that could have been occupied by another member. For that reason, we've started charging a $25 'no show' fee."

The fees are attached to a member's records and must be paid before that person can register for more free classes. "Our staff has discretion and generally lets it slide if the member has an emergency or if it's their first time missing a class," Rayne says. "But any member with repeated absences is generally charged the fee."

Rayne says that HCAR, which has about 2,000 members, has not received backlash so far for its fee. "Our members understand that we are trying to be good stewards of their dues dollars and association resources," she says.

Creative Thinking Works

At Whidbey, the new Education/DEIA Committee was designed to offer various educational opportunities, including CE classes, designation and certification courses, and awareness of DEIA for the association's 105 members.

"Toward the end of last year, the committee members chose to get an early start on a wish list of classes and instructors," Bates says. She worked with the committee to find instructors and begin scheduling dates for 2025. "Based on a survey last year and the committee's approved budget, the committee has been working on a mix of virtual and in-person classes."

This year started off with a class on the federal 1031 tax exchange program. The instructor offered free CE credits to attendees and didn't charge the association for teaching the class. (Again, it's advisable to consult counsel to ensure RESPA compliance whenever value-added services are provided.)

"It was a great way to kick off the new year," Bates says.

In Oregon, as a licensed CE provider, PMAR can develop classes that are of interest to its members but also meet the standards set by state regulators. For example, a finance class might not meet CE requirements. However, if Colin adds components that include managing a brokerage, the class will work for CE credit. In other states, regulators might require that classes first get state approval, she notes.

All along, she says, the focus is on PMAR's members. Colin says she continually asks herself, "What can I do to help members?" "How can we be of value?" ●

Thomas A. Barstow is a writer and editor based in Pennsylvania.

Get Licensed for Courses Through NAR

If your association wants to become more involved in offering courses, one place to start is the National Association of REALTORS®.

Become a licensed course provider through NAR's Center for REALTOR® Development. Learn more at **crd.realtor/become-a-provider.**

A CRD license enables your association to deliver more than 30 courses, including a course to become an Accredited Buyer Representative or Seller Representative Specialist. A full list of courses can be found at **crd.realtor.**

The CRD license fee is $2,600 for the first year and $1,100 per year afterward.

Associations with fewer than 1,000 members can co-sponsor courses with CRD-licensed providers. Co-sponsoring often involves agreements on handling various details, such as how to promote a course, how to determine where a course will be held and the process for contacting and hiring instructors, according to the website.

DUE$ DILIGE

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USE THESE EXAMPLES AND PRACTICAL ADVICE TO GET RESULTS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS ABOUT DUES BILLING.

BY MICHELE WOJCIECHOWSKI

Getting members to pay their dues is obviously necessary, but it can be a stressful process. The fact that billing often coincides with ethics and Core Standards deadlines adds to the stress.

So, how can you make communicating with members about their dues easier and more effective?

We spoke with experts in the field—at small, medium and large associations—for practical advice that works.

Tip No. 1: Email and Then Email Again

No matter the size of your association, email is the most common way to remind members about paying dues.

Nancy M. Ray, who has been the CEO of Capital Region Board of REALTORS® in Concord, N.H., for 13 years, is the sole executive staff member and handles all the dues billing herself using the NAR REALTORS® Electronic Commerce Network.

A key to getting her 350 members to respond is reminders.

"Dues billing statements are emailed to members mid-September, and reminders are sent out mid-October, mid-November and mid-December," Ray explains. "The final dues reminder is emailed to brokers in mid-January, letting them know the unpaid members in their offices—and the final day to pay dues is Feb. 1."

The last day to avoid late fees is Dec. 31. After that, members must pay their dues and a $150 late fee; Ray says that the late fee is an incentive to get members to renew by the end of the year. If they miss the Feb. 1 deadline, their memberships become inactive.

If you head a midsized association, as does Ashley Sugar, CEO of Middle Tennessee Association of REALTORS® in Murfreesboro, you might farm out part of the work.

"In 2025, we will be outsourcing some bookkeeping and using RAMCO to run our dues billing," Sugar says. "We do send follow-up emails and include reminders in the newsletter. We also encourage brokers to seek lists of unpaid agents."

Because many members prefer to pay dues in person, the association provides an additional grace day in case of bad weather or other delays. But after that, Sugar says, "We try to stick to a $25 late fee once the deadline passes, and then it bumps up to $100 after two weeks. After that, the account will incur a new application fee."

Dionna Hall, RCE, CEO of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie REALTORS® and Beaches MLS in Florida, says her association handles dues billing in-house using dedicated staff, even though it is a large association.

"Dues billing can be challenging for an association of any size; however, over the years, we have fine-tuned what works and what doesn't based on member feedback," Hall says. "Emails are just one of several touch points we use when following up and retargeting members. We use open receipts and stats to determine when a member has opened our dues billing communications. If they have not taken action, additional follow-up methods include text messages, MLS dashboard notifications and robocalls."

> **"THE MORE FREQUENTLY WE FOLLOW UP WITH OUR MEMBERS, THE QUICKER WE SEE RESULTS."**
>
> –Dionna Hall, Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie REALTORS® and Beaches MLS

The association also sends out different dues billing emails to brokers and agents. One begins with "Dear Valued Member" and the other with "Dear Valued Broker." Then comes a short summary of the basic info the recipient needs to know, followed immediately by a call-to-action button, where members can click and pay. Below the button are links to pages on the association's website that provide helpful billing information.

"The more frequently we follow up with our members, the more quickly we see results," Hall says.

Some associations include verbiage that reminds members that REALTOR® dues are not refundable. Some also send a link within the email, directing members to a breakdown of their dues on the association website. Others provide the breakdown, including what part of the dues goes to the National Association of REALTORS®, the state association and then the local association, in the initial email.

Although some messages are short and sweet, others give more information. Choosing how to structure your email can depend on what has worked (or not worked) for you in the past, as well as member feedback.

Some associations also use incentives to encourage early payment of dues. Hall says her association holds a contest, and everyone who pays in full before the due date receives a $50 education credit and an automatic entry to win free local, state and national dues (one winner); free local dues (10 winners); gift cards to American Express (25 winners) or Starbucks (100 winners); or a Supra Lockbox (50 winners).

Tip No. 2: Use Grace Periods and Deadlines to Your Advantage

Hall says that while there are usually 45 days from the launch of a dues invoice to the due date, her staff will continue to reach out to unpaid members through a variety of avenues, such as email, text message and the association's broker concierge program.

"We will also work with members individually when needed to provide payment plans that allow them to stagger the obligation over time, which helps alleviate hardships," Hall says. "We try to be as accommodating as possible and never lose sight of the fact that real estate is a commission-based business for the vast majority of our members."

Because dues billing often coincides with ethics and Core Standards deadlines, most associations suggest that preplanning, time management and communication are all key. "We try as much as we can to prep, prep, prep to allow time for the craziness of dues, but it's hard regardless of how much preparing you do," Sugar says.

That is, unless your dues billing periods and ethics and Core Standard deadlines are *not* at the same time, which can also be the case.

"We send out the dues invoices during the summer, which typically avoids any overlap with other deadlines," says Lisa Forca, director of membership services at Long Island Board of REALTORS® in West Babylon, N.Y. Invoices go out the last week of August, with a due date of Sept. 30. "Following the initial invoice, we send reminder emails 10 days prior to the due date to alert the members who have not remitted payment that the deadline is approaching. In addition, we also message about the dues invoice in our weekly LIBOR news emails to ensure members are well informed."

LIBOR provides a two-week grace period, and it sends out broker statements to inform brokers of any unpaid members along with upcoming suspension dates.

Forca says that one significant mistake brokers can make is terminating their association membership because of an inability to pay the dues on time. Members mistakenly believe they can reinstate their membership later in the year and receive a prorated bill.

"This is not the case. If a member is terminated and reinstated within the same membership year, their dues are not prorated. Proration only applies in the calendar year the member joins," she explains. (Note: Individual state and local associations may determine whether to prorate their dues. National dues may not be prorated.)

> **"WHEN MEMBERS FEEL A GENUINE SENSE OF BELONGING, IT BECOMES SIGNIFICANTLY MORE CHALLENGING FOR THEM TO CONSIDER LEAVING THE ASSOCIATION."**
>
> –Lisa Forca, Long Island Board of REALTORS®

Tip No. 3: Always Communicate Value

As Hall says, associations communicate their value to members all year long. But there are some additional actions associations can take to remind them during dues billing season.

"We make sure that members are aware of the local, state and national benefits of renewing their memberships at our general membership meetings as well as in the new member orientation," Ray says. "We invite our state executive vice president and vice president of communications to membership meetings, and they do a fantastic job of letting our members know of state membership benefits."

Sugar says her association has created videos and distributed handouts breaking down the benefits of membership, including the REALTOR® brand and recognition, advocacy, continuing education, forms and contracts, access to the MLS, networking and events, professional standards, and other benefits provided by the state and national associations.

"We also put together videos, called 'Voices of MTAR,' and included them in our newsletter with members talking about the value they receive from us," Sugar says.

Consistency is key, Forca says. "It's important to consistently communicate our value in all of our correspondence, especially when reminding our members of the many benefits available to them through their LIBOR membership," she says. "Real estate professionals are so busy working with their clients while navigating an ever-changing landscape, so we want them to avail themselves of all we have to offer. From industry-leading services, tools and advocacy to personalized legal guidance through our new Legal Support Center, we're here to empower our members and drive their success every step of the way."

Hall also makes sure association value is communicated through multiple avenues. "We created several landing pages on our website to explain our value and remind members of our key benefits," she says. "We use graphics and videos as visual aids to grab their attention. We also create [member testimonials] that we promote via email and social media before and during dues billing season."

Remind agents that paying their dues provides membership in an organization with other professionals experiencing the same challenges and successes.

"It is important to provide members with opportunities to connect with their fellow real estate professionals to share experiences and support each other," Forca says.

When members feel like they truly belong, the association becomes not just a place they join—but a community they can't imagine being without.

Michele Wojciechowski is a national award-winning writer, author and humorist based in Baltimore.

The Right Fit

When it comes to member education, there's no one size fits all. Associations small to large talk about how they design courses, right-size staffing and find fixes for common challenges.

BY KAREN HENDRICKS

Letty Oliver's office at the Miami Association of REALTORS® includes a 45-inch screen. The scenes that unfold across that screen inject bursts of joy into her day.

"Cameras show me what's going on in our conference center upstairs, and every time members step into that conference center for educational courses, it's a satisfaction that I'm fulfilling and doing what I love," says Oliver, chief of innovative education. "It's a reminder that I'm giving back to the community."

Oliver likens her position to that of a guidance counselor for her mega-size board and its members. Her community encompasses 60,000 members for whom she strategically designs educational courses that convey the knowledge and tools they need to be successful at their jobs.

The 1,100 associations affiliated with the National Association of REALTORS® offer a vast amount of education for members. Education directors like Oliver from associations of all sizes share their insights and wisdom—how they develop course offerings, handle staffing and overcome any challenges that stand in their way.

Customize Your Courses

We've all heard that everything is bigger in Texas, so how does Texas REALTORS® plan its statewide course offerings? Communication is the key, says Jon Houser, RCE, association and member development director.

He partners with local associations across the Lone Star State to offer designation and certification courses—a fact that may explain why Texas has more designation holders than any other REALTOR® association. Texas REALTORS® members can attain the Texas Accredited Commercial Specialist Certification and at least five others.

"With each of these credentials, we work with state committees to define required and elective curriculum that aligns with the committee goals for education on these topics," Houser says. "Partnering with local associations is critical for administering these courses. Texas is too big for us to serve all members by ourselves. Additionally, the local associations know the needs of their respective members and can ensure the education they offer is relevant and timely to their local real estate markets."

For Texas REALTORS®' annual conferences, Houser also develops what he describes as "unique educational opportunities related to current real estate trends." These classes, which attendees likely wouldn't find anywhere else, don't provide continuing education credits but address such timely topics as "Where Have All the Houses Gone?"

Similarly, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, there's a class called "Surf and Turf." "It discusses the balance between enjoying our lakes and rivers [and] preserving clean water and healthy riparian areas, managing wastewater and maintaining quality drinking water," says Jennifer Richards, association executive for Coeur d'Alene Regional REALTORS®.

Surf and Turf classes sell out every time they're offered, Richards says, because they speak directly to Coeur d'Alene's natural attractions—its aquifer, lakes and rivers—that draw residents and visitors alike. When developing electives, she says it's vital to consider what's going on in the region in addition to the industry as a whole. Once those timely topics have been identified, outreach begins.

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"We look into where we can find those courses—maybe from a title company, from an inspector, or maybe it's something we can satisfy with a certification or designation course," Richards says.

Back in Miami, Oliver says it's primarily feedback from her association's 60,000 members that shapes course offerings.

"We have open discussions at our board meetings where our leaders talk about what's going on in our area, since we cover three different markets," Oliver explains. "Condos are a hot topic in Miami-Dade right now, for example."

Feedback is also gathered from individual members in a very grassroots way: Oliver often stands outside classes as members leave, and she asks if they enjoyed the class or if they'd change anything about it.

"I grab that feedback and give it right back to the instructors," Oliver says.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIAMI ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

At the Miami Association of REALTORS®, Letty Oliver takes a hands-on approach to planning and executing classes.

Right-Size Your Staffing

The mechanics of planning and executing educational classes can look quite different from association to association. Oliver, for example, has six educational staffers who ensure classes run smoothly and are available to answer Miami's membership questions via phone.

At a small board like Sutter-Yuba Association of REALTORS® in California, Crystal Castle, RCE, serves as CEO and has one additional staff person. That means she depends heavily on her education committee.

"They're almost an extension of staff, so it's important for me to empower them," Castle says. "As a committee, they determine topics and instructors."

Each committee member offers hands-on help for one lunch-and-learn event annually: booking an instructor; lining up a sponsor, which partly underwrites lunch costs; being present at the course, welcoming attendees and introducing sponsors and instructors; and assisting with setup and cleanup.

"It's the one committee where it's not hard to get people," Castle says, "and as a perk, all committee members may attend all lunch-and-learns at no cost."

While Sutter-Yuba's education committee includes 10 volunteer members, Texas' statewide association boasts a professional development committee that ranges from 100 to 200 volunteer members, plus five staff members dedicated to education. Houser says technology allows the association to increase efficiency.

"We work diligently to utilize technology for streamlining our processes," Houser says. "We originally built our own system [because] there wasn't a product available to support our needs. Just recently, we transitioned to a new association management system, and they created a platform that automates much of our education workflow."

Since Houser launched his career at Texas REALTORS® in December 2005, the association has increased the number of attendees and classes offered in partnership with local associations tenfold, and it needed only one additional staff person over the 20-year period.

At Tucson Association of REALTORS® in Arizona, a membership staff of four works under the leadership of Lisa A. Nutt, school administrator and director of professional development and member services.

"We've cross-trained our member services team to provide support on the professional development and education front," Nutt explains. "Their role is administrative, assisting with class rosters, registration and enrollment, payments and issuance of certificates," which brings efficiency.

When Nutt began her educational role last year, she immediately responded to one piece of consistent feedback: Members wished instructors were locally based.

"I agreed with that sentiment and joined the association's efforts in becoming one of the first state-approved instructors for the association and helping recruit other

"My focus is on making sure we're bringing in education that our members want. We send out surveys; our committee asks or reports back from networking. We're paying attention to what they tell us."

–JENNIFER RICHARDS , COEUR D'ALENE REGIONAL REALTORS®

"I'm never too busy for a member. After overseeing education for 30 years, I have learned to value real human connections with each and every member."

–LETTY OLIVER, MIAMI ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

instructors," Nutt explains. "And that really started making a difference to the membership, because now they're seeing colleagues up on the stage, relating information about what is happening in the community and making the connections to our real estate market. I'm still a practicing [real estate licensee], and so I have arguably the credibility and integrity with participants in any educational opportunity we afford."

Find a Fix for Challenges

Attendance, pricing and scheduling—these three factors can make or break even the best-planned educational events. Nutt discovered there was a huge drop-off between the number of people registering for courses—offered at no cost—and the number who actually attended. She recognized this discrepancy as "the melt rate"—a formula known in higher ed circles, where she'd dedicated 20 years of her career. So, she began tracking her association's data.

"Our melt rate was 30% to 40%, and I just found that to be unacceptable," says Nutt, who implemented a nominal fee of $10 per course for members and $15 for nonmembers. *(Other associations suggest charging a no-show fee; see "Get Them to Show Up," page 14.)*

"That reduced our melt rate in half immediately," Nutt explains. "It was never meant to be punitive; it was merely meant to help members make a good-faith effort to show up when they said they were going to show up—because an instructor has been hired, a room has been secured, materials have been prepared, and time has been invested."

By all accounts, Tucson's new policies are working. In 2024, more than 5,400 members registered for 137 learning opportunities, and more than 4,900 attended—with a melt rate now less than 10%.

Knowing your membership may be the key to determining course pricing. In Coeur d'Alene, as of this year, education renewal classes are free to members.

"It's a benefit of being a member," Richards says, "and my focus is on making sure we're bringing in education that our members want. We send out surveys; our committee asks or reports back from networking. We're paying attention to what they tell us."

Many associations wrestle with the human tendency toward procrastination, especially when it comes to license renewal classes. In Tucson, Nutt has discovered some solutions that tap into her background in higher education.

"CE Mondays" are held every quarter, in February, April, July and October. The rhythm and consistency of CE Mondays create predictability, says Nutt, and help members avoid procrastination in scheduling. There's even a financial incentive: While CE courses are normally $10 for members, there's a special bundled rate of $60 for all eight courses.

"That's a tremendous value," Nutt says. "Every Monday, both morning and afternoon, you can take a CE class, and at the end of four Mondays, you will have completed all 24 of your credits. We make it easy for people."

In Miami, Oliver emphasizes the importance of "proactive planning, clear communications and flexibility" in executing successful educational events. This helps her overcome frequent challenges—"ensuring instructor availability, maintaining course quality and adapting to evolving industry requirements." Her guiding motto, "Knowledge is power," inspires her to "integrate innovative learning methods to maximize engagement and effectiveness" when possible.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS REALTORS®

Trending From Texas

Some of the most popular courses offered during the Texas REALTORS®' recent conferences were:

- Work Harder, Not "Smarter"—Using AI in Real Estate
- Texas HOAs: Buyer/Seller Benefits and Implications
- Utilizing Home Equity in Peak 65 and Beyond
- Playing the Long Game with Short-Term Rentals
- Overcoming Government Loan Program Bias
- Teach an Old Home New Efficiency Tricks

All that being said, Oliver also welcomes spontaneity—and the insights it unexpectedly brings.

"I have an open-door policy," she says. "Staff will come and say, 'You have a member waiting to see you.' And I always see them immediately—I'm never too busy for a member. After overseeing education for 30 years, I have learned to value real human connections with each and every member." ●

Karen Hendricks is an award-winning journalist based in Pennsylvania.

Choice for Sellers, Transparency for Buyers

New MLS policy expands seller options while ensuring buyers continue to have a fair and transparent view of inventory.

As Multiple Listing Services assess and implement the new Multiple Listing Options for Sellers policy, consumer choice remains paramount. In preparation for the Sept. 30 implementation deadline, MLSs, associations and brokerages across the country are developing educational tools and disclosures so that sellers understand their choices and can determine the best marketing strategy to achieve their goals—whether they're seeking privacy, testing the market, aiming for a fast sale or needing maximum return.

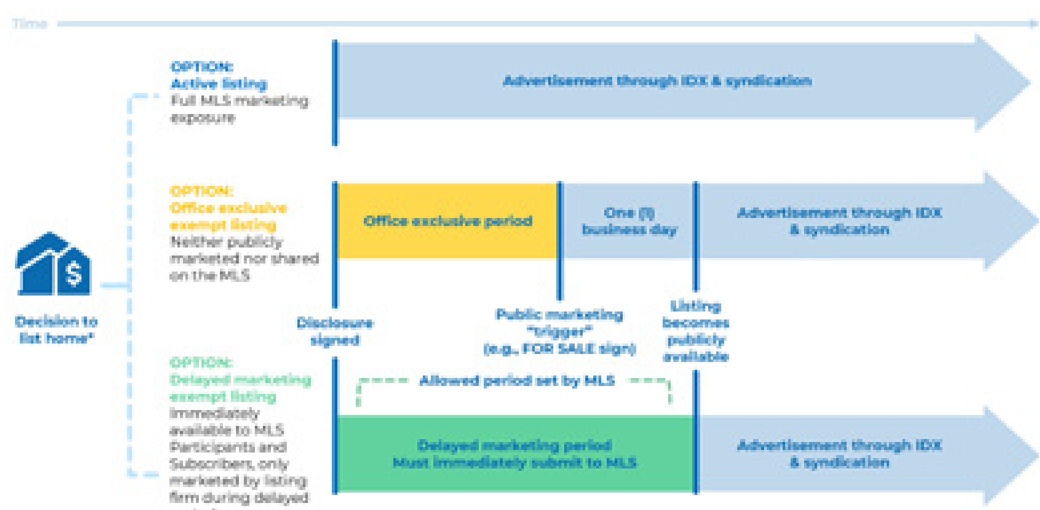
Because buyer choice is equally important, the new policy works alongside the Clear Cooperation Policy to ensure buyers and their agents have equal access to the inventory of properties for sale.

Getting Down to Basics

The new policy—developed following many months of analysis and consultation with MLS and association leaders; brokerages; agents; multicultural organizations; and fair housing, policy, technology and legal experts—introduces a category of exempt listings called **"delayed marketing exempt listings."** Some important parameters of this new option include:

- **Sellers choose.** The exemption allows home sellers to instruct their listing agent to delay marketing their property through internet data exchange and syndication for a specified period. During the delayed marketing period, sellers and their listing agent can market the listing in a manner consistent with the sellers' needs and interests.
- **MLSs determine the delay period.** The National Association of REALTORS® is encouraging MLSs to engage with participants and stakeholders before the Sept. 30 implementation deadline to determine what will work best in the local market or region.
- **Signed disclosure is required.** When sellers choose to delay the public marketing of their listing, their agent must secure a signed disclosure documenting the sellers' informed consent to waive the benefits of immediate public marketing through IDX and syndication. Seller disclosure is required for both **delayed marketing exempt listings** and **office exclusive exempt listings.** An office exclusive listing, as defined under CCP, is one in which the sellers have directed that their property may not be disseminated through the MLS and may not be publicly marketed. An MLS may require that office exclusive listings be submitted but may not disseminate them to other MLS participants and subscribers.
- **MLS visibility is still required.** Delayed marketing exempt listings are filed with the MLS within one day of public marketing and available for other MLS participants and subscribers to access and share with their clients and consumers. This is in line with CCP, which remains fully in effect. However, the MLS and other participants and subscribers are delayed from displaying the listing through an IDX feed and syndicating those listings to other entities.

The Sept. 30 implementation deadline allows MLSs time to make technical changes associated with the new exemption and engage with brokers and stakeholders to gather input on the flexibility and accommodations consumers need in their local market. ●



*Consumers always have the option to file their property as a regular MLS listing which is immediately available to MLS Participants and Subscribers and advertised through IDX and syndication.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

See FAQs about multiple listing options for sellers at facts.realtor.

GOVERNANCE

Core Competencies

NAR's Governance team tackles your questions on policies and training as required by new Core Standards requirements. **BY DANIEL DOEPKE**

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New Core Standards requirements for 2025 focus on policy certifications, training and a new cybersecurity policy. As always, the National Association of REALTORS® has staff experts and resources to help. Here are some of the top questions we've received on the requirements for the training of elected officers and how to create a strong cybersecurity policy.

Q: One of the new Core Standards requirements for 2025 is to identify certain association leadership policies and provide training to elected officers on those policies. Does NAR have any models or guidance on how to best train our volunteer leaders and how to create these policies, if needed?

A: Last year, the Executive Committee approved changes to the Core Standards as recommended by the Reimagine Core Standards Work Group. Those changes include the following new Core Standards:

Associations must identify their leadership policies concerning antitrust, harassment, conflict of interest, confidentiality, Code of Conduct, whistleblower, etc., and upload them to the Core Standards Certification Form.

Associations will offer annual training of no less than 1 hour on the above-mentioned policies for elected officers and the Board of Directors.

The purpose of the annual training for elected officers is to ensure that volunteer members who hold elected office in an association are fully aware and have a firm understanding of the policies and expectations of their roles. With a minimum requirement of one hour total to cover all association leadership policies, associations have wide latitude to structure the training in whichever way works best for them.

As an example, an association executive could give an overview of relevant policies using a slide presentation at a scheduled board of directors meeting. Associations with numerous policies affecting their leadership could dive deeper by providing a recorded webinar or scheduling a series of training sessions.

Associations looking to create or update these policies can lean on our Governance Guide for Association Executives (nar.realtor/ae/governance-guide-for-association-executives), which has sample policies provided by Texas REALTORS® as a courtesy for association staff to reference. This page also includes a link to the REALTOR® Association Resource Exchange (RARE) Database, a repository for associations to upload and share their resources for other associations to utilize as needed. Lastly, we also maintain the Good Sense Governance series (nar.realtor/about-nar/policies/good-sense-governance), which contains extensive resources addressing harassment and writing Codes of Conduct.

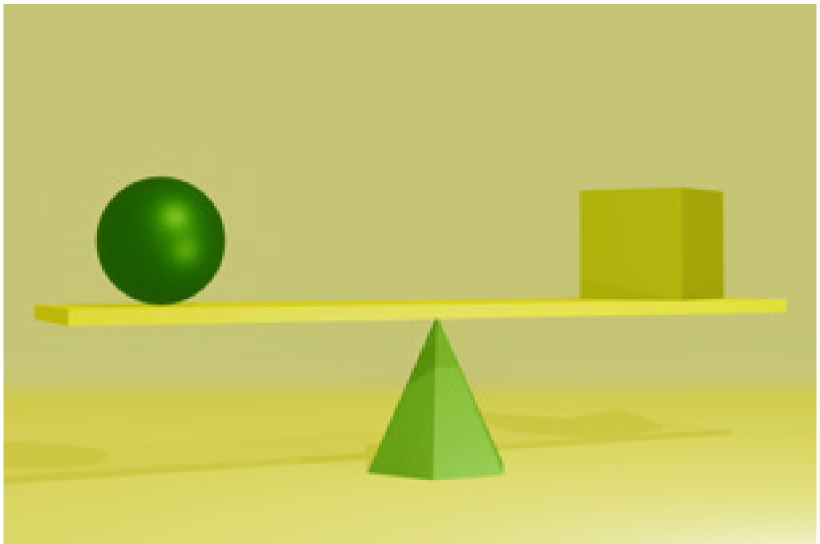
With that said, it is important that associations craft their own policies with the help of their legal counsel. In many cases, state law may dictate what these policies can contain and whom they cover.

Q: Another new Core Standards requirement is for each association to have a cybersecurity policy. Does NAR also have resources that will help our association create one?

A: NAR offers the Data Security and Privacy Toolkit, available online at nar.realtor/data-privacy-security/nars-data-security-and-privacy-toolkit. This comprehensive resource contains sample policies and best practices that associations can use to develop a strong cybersecurity policy.

In addition, NAR maintains a Data Privacy and Security webpage at nar.realtor/data-privacy-security, where there are various articles, security tips and legal information for both associations and members. As always, employing the assistance of local legal counsel will ensure that the policy is sound and compliant with applicable law. ●

Daniel Doepke is director of member policy at the National Association of REALTORS®.



The Delicate Balancing Act

If you want a great member experience, know what member education is and what it isn't. **BY BOB TAYLOR**

The most valuable asset members have is their market knowledge. The hard part for associations? Getting members to realize it. Market knowledge is what differentiates our members from other real estate agents. It elevates their "game," it provides true self-confidence (versus "fake it 'til you make it"), it allows them to operate at a higher level, and it increases their income.

This is why providing member education must be an association priority.

However, associations must be careful that members do not perceive us as positioning education as a source of non-dues revenue. If this is the perception (whether or not it is reality), you might get attendance, but you will not produce a great member experience, and you will certainly not generate member respect or loyalty.

Remember, education on its own is not a member benefit. The benefit comes from the results that education provides (and it's much more than the initials after their name), making members more productive, successful and profitable.

To help members get these results, associations can demonstrate care when preparing a course. Start by asking these questions. Is the course:

- Topically relevant in your market?
- Priced to demonstrate care about affordability and to attract maximum attendance?
- Taught by a recognized expert?
- Providing a complete experience (refreshments, materials, etc.)?
- A quality reflection on you as an organization?
- Designed to include an introduction by an association leader?

Here's an example: We deliver a Real Estate Buyer's Agent Council course for $175 per live attendee, regardless of association membership, with an in-person instructor. The $175 includes course materials, breakfast and lunch, and the course is taught by an out-of-state, nationally recognized instructor who is a National Association of REALTORS® member.

Some may have seen nearly the same class offered at a higher cost as a virtual-only offering, without breakfast or lunch.

Agents aware of both options may perceive that the former demonstrates care and the latter is a money grab.

Always remember, it is the members we are supposed to serve and support.

A Final Note on Brokerages

Associations should also not compete with brokerages on education. I learned that lesson 24 years ago when our president, my largest broker and good friend, made it clear he was extremely unhappy that associations were providing classes to members using his agents' dues dollars, effectively discouraging brokerages from creating and offering their own programming. Since then, we have never provided such instruction.

To support brokerages, associations should:

- Know what education your brokerages already provide.
- Provide enough education to make members aware of what they might not know (at no cost).
- Offer risk-reduction content such as antitrust laws (at no cost).
- Teach designation and certification courses that brokerages cannot provide.
- Include NAR branding in instructions or communications to a brokerage when possible.

Remember, while associations aren't charitable enterprises, they must deliver education as a service to the members, not only as a source of non-dues revenue. They must get to know their brokers, respect the integrity of brokerage businesses and comprehend market conditions.

They should also take care there are no conflicts of interest among those who make the decisions on what is taught, how courses are taught, course pricing and who does the teaching. All of this is why education for members is a delicate balancing act. ●

Bob Taylor, RCE, is the CEO of the Grosse Pointe Board of REALTORS® in Michigan. An agent for 40 years, he has 12 NAR-related designations and certifications and is an approved REBAC instructor.

Mind the Gap

It's a great metaphor for staff and leadership professional development.

BY CAROLE KAPTUR

Several years ago, while on a vacation in London, my daughter very successfully mastered the art of navigating London's underground transportation, commonly known there as "the tube." This was interesting to me because she didn't grow up in an area that had public transportation. Although I grew up in Chicago and took the "El," or elevated train, most of my working life, sadly, I was not as experienced abroad, so we agreed that she would be our transportation expert during the trip.

Beyond my daughter's newly acquired navigation skills, what interested me was that at every stop, the conductor would say, "Mind the Gap." There were notices painted on the ground in front of each entry to a door: "Mind the Gap," in bold letters.

It struck me as a metaphor for learning and development. We should always "mind the gap." It's very easy to let someone who inherently seems better at something take over—even if it's not their job. But it's not as easy to develop someone who has the actual job responsibility. I am not saying it was my daughter's job to navigate or that it was mine. But it was certainly easier to let her handle it than try to figure it out myself.

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In the workplace, we often find that we can rely on others to navigate the gaps in our skills. We do this by constantly asking questions about the same things. As leaders, we do this by removing responsibility from one employee and giving it to another. These actions become a workaround, ignoring an opportunity for professional development, especially in times when resources are very limited.

Yet working around these gaps ends up weakening the workforce. While we may think we are playing to employees' strengths, we miss the opportunity to build up the professionalism and overall capacity of our staff, which in turn would allow us to have a more robust organization with increased capabilities to serve members.

At the leadership level, gaps are called "blind spots." Remember when we were learning to drive, and we were taught to be aware of the blind spot? It's the same thing in business. If we don't know where our blind spot is, we will very likely crash, causing our careers to derail.

If we have any level of self-awareness, it's likely we already know where we need to improve. Fortunately, we're never beyond learning and changing our behaviors.

I've often had people tell me they don't need any training or professional development because they're at the top of their game. Yet think about all the athletes who have amazing careers, and suddenly, they don't play so well anymore. There's a series of missed throws, missed catches, missed touchdowns. That's what happens when you think you can't get any better.

The word "training" can prompt a negative reaction from employees—that attitude of "I don't need to be trained in anything." It can feel difficult to say yes to continued learning—or professional development or training—because we might think it isn't good to admit we need help in any area. But it shows strength to say, "Yes, I'll learn something new."

Our members are required to take a certain number of hours of continuing education, so why wouldn't we as staff follow that same practice?

You may already be aware of gaps that require training. If not, take the association's job descriptions (which are hopefully well-written and truly descriptive) and make mental notes of where your staff might need additional support to improve their job performance. In other words, identify the gap.

> Fortunately, we're never beyond learning and changing our behaviors.

Then, consider any constructive feedback you've provided in annual reviews. Conduct an internet search for professional development programs based on the identified criteria. Many programs are quite reasonably priced; just be sure to include funds in your budget. This is minding the gap.

Keep in mind that adults have different learning styles. Employers today tend to want to throw an instructional video at everything, but not every one is a visual learner. Some people learn best through reading, some learn through touch, some learn by doing and others through hearing. Try to find a professional development option that includes all styles, so you offer the employee a fully balanced program.

Discuss any opportunities you've discovered with your staff members and encourage them to participate. Make it a performance goal for their annual evaluation. If they don't like the options you've offered, give them the budget parameters and encourage them to find something independently. Make sure they get enrolled and keep the commitment.

As it turns out, traveling can be more than just fun and relaxing—it can also be an opportunity for insight and learning. Mind the gap, folks! ●

Carole Kaptur, SHRM-SCP, is an independent human resources consultant.

Higher Education

HomeTown Association of REALTORS® AE Heather Wiedrich, RCE, C2EX

Having more than 100 members in a class is nothing unusual for HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in Sycamore, Ill. Its association executive, Heather Wiedrich, RCE, C2EX, takes a practical approach to getting members to understand the value of the professional development offered by associations.

When it comes to member education, what's your biggest challenge, and how do you solve it?

The biggest challenge is when members choose to use a continuing education school outside the REALTOR® association family. Sometimes the third-party schools do not properly report to the state for credit, and then the members call us for help wondering how to address that. We can only refer them back to that school for help.

Which classes are most popular, and why?

Members are always looking for the greatest tips and tricks to better their services to their clients; that's why our technology classes—Virtual Real Estate Business, Digital Agent Toolkit and Real Estate Searching, for example—are the most popular. These courses are created by and provided to our members by our MLS, Midwest Real Estate Data.

What budget amount is devoted to member education?

Education is one of our top priorities. As a result of our technology and efficiencies, we offer virtual classroom sessions, resulting in annual expenses of less than 1% of our total budget being allocated for education. As amazing as it might sound, we are able to offer our virtual CE sessions free to our members as a benefit within our framework.

What's worth spending money on, and where can you trim expenses?

Professional development such as designations and certifications are key when offering education. We also offer training throughout the year to keep members aware of current events and trends in real estate. By collaborating with business partners and our MLS, we can offset expenses.

How do you decide what to hold in person and what to hold virtually—and how do you keep members engaged?

We've offered our CE and education sessions virtually for the past five years. Our attendance increased by 80%, and members now prefer the virtual option because they can complete education from anywhere, and it saves them time and money. For member engagement, we focus on in-person networking opportunities and events.

Do you have any easy tricks for member education?

Free education! We partner with MRED for classes approved by Illinois REALTORS® that our instructors can teach. As a member benefit, MRED covers all costs of these classes for our members.

If you could get members to understand just one thing about the value of the education offered by associations, what would that be?

The real estate industry is growing to be very complex. That makes professional development highly necessary so that members are fully equipped to provide the very best services to their clients and customers. ●

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