

REALTOR[®] AE

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL FOR REALTOR[®] ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

SUMMER 2013

Your Value

Define it. Communicate it. Deliver it.

Real Estate

REALTOR[®]
Association

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Regional MLSs Fail
page 6

Make Your E-newsletter
a Member Must-Read
page 20

Why Public Transit Planning
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Plus: Defending the REALTOR[®] Marks • Value Partnerships

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The RAE editorial board reviews each issue and provides critical feedback, proposes story ideas and industry contacts to interview, and stays in touch with fellow AEs 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, e-mail Carolyn Schwaar at cschwaar@realtors.org.



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AEC Chair

Four Cs of Leadership



Mark Allen, RCE, CIPS, CRS, is CEO of the Minneapolis Area Association of REALTORS®. Contact him at 952-988-3134 or marka@mplsrealtor.com.

While at dinner with some very good friends recently, our discussion evolved to the subject of leadership. Two of us shared with our younger friends the principles of leadership we each use as our guides in how we manage and lead others. It was amazing how similar our principles could be even though our individual leadership style is very different.

During my first year or two at my Minneapolis Area Association of REALTORS® job, Jim Peters, former CEO of the South Carolina Association of REALTORS®, shared some principles of leadership that I have forever held close. They have served me well during days filled with sunshine and in days of raging storms. They are the four “Cs” of leadership: character, competence, challenge and conviction.

These were inspired by the writings of John C. Maxwell. These four “Cs” are the required infrastructure that people must see in you before they will be inspired to follow you.

• CHARACTER

More than anything else, followers want to believe that their leaders are ethical and honest. They want to say, “Someday I want to be like him or her.”

• COMPETENCE

When your people see that you not only are well-qualified to lead the organization but also have a track record of successes, they will have confidence in following you, even when they don’t understand all the details.

• CHALLENGE

By creating a clear and compelling vision, you will give others a reason to contribute to the cause. It’s your job as a leader to get your people excited about what their work will accomplish. When they have a sense of purpose that they’re challenged to fulfill, you will rarely have problems motivating them to contribute.

• CONVICTION

If you don’t believe in a vision that you are trying to advance, the people will sense that something is missing and be very reluctant to follow. On the other hand, when your people sense that you are so confident of moving in a certain direction that you’d make personal sacrifices to do so, they are more willing to dig deep within themselves to give an extra effort as well.

In my experience, the more visible and transparent I can be in each of these areas, the more success I have at home and at work. I often review these principles before launching a major initiative or before entering an important meeting. As Maxwell suggests, I have an accountability friend with whom I share ideas and goals for improvement. I continue to try to improve in each of these areas, one step at a time.

—Mark Allen, 2013 Chair, AE Committee

MORE ONLINE

Visit the AE Committee page at REALTOR.org for more on AEC activities in 2013.



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REALTOR® AE magazine



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What's in a Name?

The Georgia Association of REALTORS® is now known as Georgia REALTORS® after removing “association” from its brand earlier this year.

“We felt that ‘Georgia Association of REALTORS®’ was a ‘thing’ and that ‘Georgia REALTORS®’ are people,” explains Brandie Miner, the association’s communications director. “It’s just a different direction in how we wanted to present ourselves.”

The move is not uncommon and, in fact, is gaining popularity. Both the Washington and Wisconsin associations of REALTORS® have a similar DBA, in part to avoid the awkward acronym WAR. “It took a couple of years to get everyone on board with the change, but now if someone calls us ‘WAR’ in a meeting, members will correct the speaker,” says Stephen Klaniecki, Washington’s communications and marketing director. The acronym SCAR also prompted the South Carolina Association of REALTORS® to adopt South Carolina REALTORS® as its DBA in 2008.

Earlier this year, the Mississippi Association of REALTORS® embarked on a multi-year rebranding plan that began with a new name (DBA), logo, and tagline: Mississippi REALTORS®: “Property Professionals—Community Champions.” The new brand focuses on professionalism and community and political advocacy, the association says.

The Columbus Board of REALTORS®, Ohio, rebranded itself this year as the Columbus REALTORS®, which will also be the name of its redesigned publication and Web site. “We know our members, and the public, will shorten Columbus Board of REALTORS® and we didn’t want to brand an acronym,” says Marque Bressler, the association’s communications director. “Many already refer to us as Columbus REALTORS®.” The daunting task ahead, Bressler notes, is to change the name on all association materials and services.



What is a DBA?

Any association of REALTORS® can change its name or establish a DBA if approved by the National Association of REALTORS® policy committee (according to the renaming guidelines) and properly registered with its secretary of state office.

Although the Washington REALTORS® rebranded eight years ago, they are still the Washington Association of REALTORS® as far as the National Association is concerned and on legal documents, says Klaniecki.

These new brand names are part of a repositioning trend to move associations away from being perceived as the governing body that provides services to REALTORS®. The goal is to become the group of professionals that represents the interests of REALTORS® and home owners in the community and in politics. ■



Earn Your Certificate in Real Estate Association Management Online

In addition to the Real Estate Association—Management concentration in the full Masters in Real Estate (MRE) degree program, REALTOR® University now offers a graduate certificate program in Real Estate Association Management.

“With the void being left by phasing out the University of Chicago certificate in nonprofit management, this program is ideal for association executives and association staff looking to take their skills and career to the next level,” says Jonathan Salk, dean of student services for REALTOR® University.

A minimum six online courses are required for the certificate: Real Estate Association Management I—Leadership and Governance; Real Estate Association Management II—Association Financial Management; Program Development and Accountability in Real Estate Associations; Issues and Trends in Real Estate; Real Estate Law; and Real Estate Finance and Investments.

Enrollment is now open and candidates must have a bachelor’s degree. Cost is estimated at \$9,000 with tuition per course at \$1,500. Students could complete the certificate in as little as year, says Salk, or take as long as needed. Credits for these six courses can also be applied to the master’s degree program.

For more information, visit www.RealtorU.com.

Oklahoma REALTOR® Associations Coordinate Tornado Relief

The amount of help that poured into the tornado-stricken Oklahoma City area from REALTOR® associations nationwide was “just incredible,” says Darla Cheek, government affairs director for the Oklahoma City Metro Association of REALTORS® (OKCMAR).

More than 50 REALTOR® associations contributed to the Oklahoma Housing Foundation REALTOR® Disaster Relief Fund (which stands at nearly \$315,000) to aid affected residents, and nearly a dozen REALTOR® associations donated supplies. “The Kansas City and the Joplin associations came back twice with trucks full of relief supplies,” says Cheek. Water, shovels, blankets, food, and clothing came from associations as far as Oregon and Florida and other associations sent thousands of dollars’ worth of gift cards so volunteers and residents could buy supplies.

The May tornados left 18 REALTORS® homeless and more than 500 people injured and 49 dead.

Kim Cox, CEO of the Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS® in Joplin, Mo. (which weathered a catastrophic tornado in 2011), called OKCMAR to offer help and advice just hours after the twister struck. “I couldn’t have gotten through this without their help,” says Cheek. “Kim said, ‘Help will come,’ but when you’re in the middle of it, you don’t think it will come. But it did.”

Tessa Hultz, of the Raleigh (N.C.) Regional Association of REALTORS®, was CEO of the Wichita Area Association of REALTORS® at the time of the tornado. She coordinated the deliveries and volunteers from REALTOR® associations across the country. Hultz launched a Facebook page where survivors and aid workers could post requests and volunteers would respond.

“We’d post a list of our needs on the Facebook page and truckloads would come,” says Cheek.



Members of the Oklahoma Association of REALTORS® coordinating tornado relief supplies.

REALTOR® First Responders

“The day after the tornado struck in El Reno, Okla., we pulled our truck into the parking lot of the community center, set up as a shelter, and saw a family standing there and the kids had no shoes,” Cheek recalls. “We brought the first relief supplies there two days before the Red Cross arrived.”

The area no longer needs emergency relief supplies, says Cheek. “Everyone is in temporary housing, but what we’re worried about now is how we’re going to get people back in homes.” It is estimated that 41 percent of the affected residents did not have insurance.

There is no housing inventory to sell in the area and property loss is estimated at more than 1,150 homes, with total economic losses expected to exceed \$5 billion.

“It’s going to be a long haul,” says Cheek. “Yet with all of the new building and rebuilding, I think we’re going to gain members. There is going to be a huge demand for REALTORS®.” ■



REALTOR® Care Day Volunteers Take on 27 Improvement Projects

More than 400 central Ohio REALTORS®, family, and friends cleaned, painted, pruned, and planted as part of the Columbus Association of REALTORS®’ ninth annual REALTOR® Care Day on June 14. Started in 2005, REALTOR® Care Day is an annual day of service to the communities in which REALTORS® live, work, and raise families. In the past nine years, REALTOR® Care Day has contributed more than \$250,000 in improvements and repairs and hundreds of hours of service to residents and communities around central Ohio.

“Most REALTORS® give of their time and talents throughout the year,” says Chris Pedon, 2013 president of the Columbus Association of REALTORS®. “But this one-day event allows us to focus our collective energy—as well as those of our family, friends, and colleagues—to make a significant difference in central Ohio.”

REALTOR® Care Day is funded through the REALTORS® Charitable Foundation Fund. Additional assistance is received from many individuals and companies through in-kind donations of money, goods, and services.



Briefing

MLS BUSINESS

Florida MLS Dissolves While Merger Trend Remains

After 26 years, the three REALTOR® association shareholders of the Regional MLS Inc. in southeast Florida voted in June to dissolve the corporation. For at least a year, key MLS operations were being disbanded back to the individual associations: REALTORS® Association of the Palm Beaches; Jupiter-Tequesta-Hobe Sound Association of REALTORS®; and the REALTORS® Association of St. Lucie. As a result of the final dissolution, each association will operate its own MLS system, although the three MLSs will continue pooling listing data.

Merging MLSs to achieve economies of scale is still the trend. The dissolution of this regional MLS, according to an Inman News report, stemmed in part from the belief that the regional service, with its large governance structure, had become a duplication of effort and resources.

MLS circle of life

REALTOR® AE magazine spoke to veteran MLS executives about why some regional services thrive while others fail.

“When it comes to MLSs breaking apart, there is one cause and one cause only,” says Cameron M. Paine, RCE, CEO of the Connecticut Multiple Listing Service Inc. “It’s politics. And politics has very little to do with what’s best for the membership.”

Politics encompasses a host of issues, from conflicting personalities to mistrust, but Paine has seen it as the cause of MLS breakups from Florida to Arizona. “It’s disappointing, it’s disheartening,” he says, “but fortunately, it’s not a trend in that there’s no common issue among these different MLS entities falling apart, aside from politics.”

Is there a cure? Paine says the only way to avoid political issues is to have your very best and brightest as your leadership. “However, because of the association governance structure, we’re not always getting the most qualified to serve—sometimes, we’re getting the most willing to serve.”

MLS success stories are not hard to find. Earlier this year, 13 REALTOR® associations across Indiana formed the Indiana Regional MLS, in which more than 5,000 real estate professionals—who formerly used 13 independent MLS systems—will be able to search across multiple markets and pay only one MLS fee to access data.

“[IRMLS] has done some great things working through the thorny political issues,” says Paine. “They’re a good example of getting past the politics that is so often the stumbling block.”

Rosemary Scardina, RCE, CAE, president and CEO of East Bay Regional Data in California, believes the root cause of regional MLS breakups may be financial. “It all comes down to the money,”

she says. “People think there’s a lot of money to be made in MLS.”

Poor financial planning also spells disaster when it comes to merging MLSs, says Scardina. “I’ve seen associations join a regional MLS without a sound financial plan for where their nondues revenue is going to come from, and they end up viewing the regional [service] as a lost revenue stream.”

New pressure points

The premise of founding a regional MLS for economics of scale is sound, Scardina notes, “but you still need to give value. And if there’s no perceived value, regional shareholders may begin to ask themselves, ‘What are we getting out of this?’”

Another pressure point on MLSs today, says Scardina, is the rapid change in the industry in terms of technology: consumers and members are better educated about the data and where to find it. “This is such a specific industry now, yet some people have tunnel vision and want to run things the way they always have,” she says.

There are more regional MLSs forming today than ever before, says Carl R. DeMusz, RCE, president and CEO of the Northern Ohio Regional MLS. “It’s happening because MLSs with more members, more listings to share, and more opportunities for those members to make sales make members happy, and they make their consumers happy.” He describes MLSs as communities that are better when they are more inclusive than exclusive. “It would be hard to make the case that fewer members and less listing content would make an MLS better.”

MLSs can break apart, however, when there is perceived inequality, DeMusz says. Among the many possible reasons why regional MLSs dissolve (or do not form in the first place) is the perception that smaller MLSs have less decision-making power, revenue, or other local advantages, he says. Plus, there’s the idea that one MLS may believe it has a better governance model or technology vendor than other potential shareholders.

DeMusz’s own regional MLS, which covers six counties in the Cleveland, Ohio, region, shares data with a neighboring regional MLS. Together they serve five separate MLSs of various sizes with a variety of prices and features. “Although we may grow, it is hard to imagine a scenario where we would shrink or dissolve,” says DeMusz. “Doing the right thing takes leadership that will rise above difficult issues and serve the whole community.” ■



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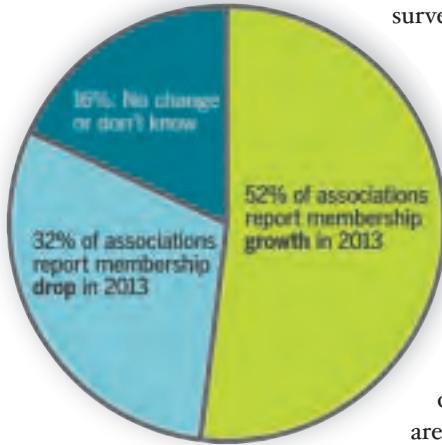


Briefing

TRENDS, NAR NEWS, CONSUMER OUTREACH

Study Shows Association Membership on the Rise

For the second year in a row a majority (52 percent) of associations surveyed for the annual Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report from Marketing General Inc. report a growth in membership. Slightly more than 30 percent reported a decline in their membership for this year's survey of nearly 700 associations nationwide.



As was the case in the 2012 survey, the top three challenges to growing membership, according to the report, remain insufficient staff, difficulty attracting and/or maintaining younger members, and perception of the association and/or its culture.

Associations say their top two membership goals for 2013 are to increase member engagement and increase both membership acquisition and retention.

The primary reasons members join associations, according to association executives, are networking (24 percent), access to specialized/current information (13 percent), and advocacy (8 percent).

The top three reasons members cite for not renewing their membership are: 1) Budget cuts/economic hardship of the company; 2) Lack of engagement with the organization; and 3) Unable to justify membership costs with any significant ROI. To download a free copy of the report, visit www.marketinggeneral.com/resources/benchmark-report/. ■

A 2013 from Marketing General Inc. survey of 700+ associations.

Key West Association Wins MLS Data Copyright Case

A Florida court awarded \$2.7 million to the Key West Association of REALTORS® in its copyright infringement action against Robert Allen, a local real estate practitioner. Allen had been operating Web sites, including KeyWestMLS.com, made up almost entirely of content, data, and images reproduced from the association's MLS. KWAR brought the copyright infringement action against Allen in 2011 after numerous cease-and-desist requests were ignored. The full case is outlined on REALTOR® Magazine Online (RealtorMag.REALTOR.org). Search for "Key West." ■

Neighborhood Antitrust Claim Against NAR Dismissed

Real estate listing portal and agent ratings Web site NeighborCity.com took a blow in its lawsuit against the National Association of REALTORS® and Metropolitan Regional Information Systems Inc. (MRIS) on June 10 when Federal District Judge Alexander Williams Jr. dismissed all seven counts of its antitrust claim.

NeighborCity.com's operator, American Home Realty Network, filed the antitrust suit in September 2012, in response to a copyright infringement suit filed by MRIS in March 2012. MRIS claimed NeighborCity.com provides "unauthorized access to and use of" copyrighted MRIS data to support the company's referral business. ■



Fort Collins REALTORS® Support Four Local Candidates: Three Win

When the National Association of REALTORS® dues increase went into effect two years ago, the Fort Collins Board of REALTORS® made a promise to its 750 members to bring those dollars back to the northern Colorado community in the form of grants from the REALTOR® Party. This spring, it made good on that promise, supporting four candidates for local election, including mayor, with an Independent Expenditure Grant from NAR. The funding paid for get-out-the-vote calls and a combination of online advertising and social media messaging that reached the college town's younger voters more effectively than traditional print media. Three of the four candidates who benefited from FCBP's support won: the incumbent mayor and two of the candidates running for City Council. Read more stories like this in the REALTOR® Party newsletter at REALTORActionCenter.com. — By Tania Lee

Wisconsin REALTORS® Help Re-Elect Property Rights Champion to State Supreme Court

Working closely with a well-established coalition of like-minded partners, the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association led an independent expenditure campaign for the re-election of Justice Pat Roggensack, one of the four-justice majority seen as favoring property rights on Wisconsin's Supreme Court. "Just recently, she voted to uphold a 1963 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision that allows real estate professionals to fill out state-approved forms without an attorney, a matter very dear to our members' hearts," says Joe Murray, WRA's director of Political and Governmental Affairs. With a \$210,000 grant from NAR that financed a two-week statewide radio campaign, WRA helped Roggensack fight off challenger Ed Fallone to win 57.5 percent of the vote. — By Tania Lee

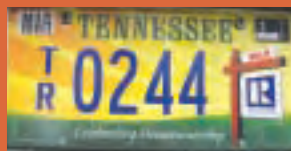


Calif. Launches New Consumer Ad Campaign, Web Site

The California Association of REALTORS® launched its 2013 consumer advertising campaign this spring boasting the theme, “California REALTORS®. Champions of Home.” The campaign, and its accompanying Web site (championsofhome.com), aims to position California REALTORS® as being at the core of economic growth throughout the state and to create awareness of the many benefits of the consumer-to-REALTOR® relationship. Television commercials aired exclusively on ABC television stations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego. For more, visit www.car.org/aboutus/adcampaign.

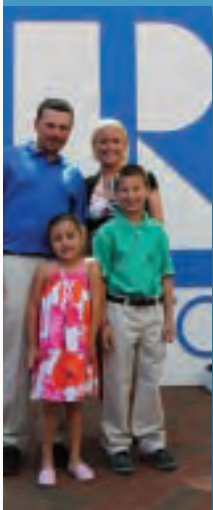
Nondues Revenue Success with Plates

To the surprise of the Tennessee Association of REALTORS®, the highest grossing program from its educational foundation last year was its special “Celebrating Homeownership” automobile license plate that generated \$16,500 from the approximately 1,100 REALTORS® in the state who ordered or renewed the plate. The annual fee is \$56.50, of which \$15.62 is allocated to the Tennessee Real Estate Educational Foundation to be used exclusively to promote consumer protection through the education of real estate professionals in Tennessee.



FAR Joins in Home Donation to Wounded Veteran

The Florida Association of REALTORS®, in partnership with the Military Warriors Support Foundation, donated a house to a wounded Florida veteran and his family. Retired Army Sgt. Michael Burke, his wife Nichole, and two children were presented with a newly remodeled, mortgage-free home in Port St. Lucie during the association’s “Rally for Homeownership” at the state capitol in April. The Florida Association donated \$20,000 to provide the family with the three-year financial mentoring they must complete before obtaining the deed to the house. Chase Bank donated the three-bedroom, 1,500-square-foot property and Home Depot handled the renovations. The Military Warriors Support Foundation has coordinated the donation of 300 homes to wounded military veterans nationwide. For more, visit www.militarywarriors.org/openhomes.



NAR’s Latest Consumer Advertising Campaign Speaks to Homeowners

The newest commercial, “Satellite Earth,” in NAR’s Market Momentum campaign speaks directly to homeowners who may have been waiting through a down market to sell their homes, explaining that buyers are in the market and given the shortage of homes for sale in many parts of the country, now may be the right time to think about selling.

NAR had changed the official name of its advertising program. Formerly known as the Public Advocacy Campaign, the program is now known as the Consumer Advertising Campaign, which doesn’t imply a particular advertising message strategy. The name change was approved by NAR’s Board of Directors at its meeting in May.

In addition to the TV and radio ads that will run as part of NAR’s national media buy, the campaign includes print and digital materials that local associations and members can use. Visit the online ad generator at REALTOR.org to access and customize the materials to your market. ■

Making Sense of Home Finance Options

The California Association of REALTORS® launched a Finance Helpline in February that provides members with assistance on issues related to short sales, funding, REOs, deeds in lieu, and finalizing transactions. Members can either call the helpline or submit an online inquiry to be connected to a lender liaison for one-on-one assistance. ■

Briefing

AE CAREERS & EDUCATION

AE Liaison Joins Federal Credit Union for REALTORS®

Knowing how to best present the value of the REALTORS® Federal Credit Union (a division of Northwest Federal Credit Union) services to members just got easier with the appointment of Victoria Gillespie, who will work primarily with AEs to develop and tailor credit union offerings to meet the needs of individual associations nationwide.



Victoria Gillespie, REALTORS® Federal Credit Union's new national director of business development

Gillespie is a REALTOR® with more than 20 years of banking experience. In her first few weeks on the job she partnered with the Frederick County Association of REALTORS® to offer a REALTORS® Dues Savings Account designed to enable members to proactively save for their annual dues.

The credit union offers more than 4,600 branch service centers nationwide, plus business checking, mortgage loans, commercial real estate loans, and other financial services. Contact Gillespie directly at 703-251-2190 or vgillespie@realtorsfcu.org. ■

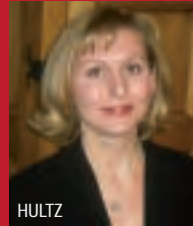
AEs on the Move



ANDERST

• **La Dawn Anderst** is the new CEO of the Idaho Association of REALTORS®. Anderst has spent 22 years with IAR, serving as education director, membership services director, convention coordinator, director of operations, and interim CEO.

• **Miki Bass** is the new CEO of the Arkansas Association of REALTORS®. Bass has more than 16 years of experience within the association, most recently as chief operating officer. Bass replaces Mark Marchand, who served as CEO for two years.



HULTZ

• **Tessa Hultz** is the new CEO of the 5,000-member Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS® in North Carolina. She replaces Ray Larcher, who is retiring after nearly 20 years. Hultz was the CEO of the Wichita Area Association of REALTORS® in Kansas.

Meet the New RCEs

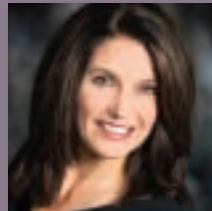
These 12 REALTOR® association executives earned their RCE (REALTOR® association Certified Executive) designation after an extensive course of study and exam in March. RCE is the only professional designation created specifically for REALTOR® association executives. It exemplifies goal-oriented AEs with drive, experience, and commitment to professional growth. Candidates earn the designation by accumulating points through an experience- and education-based application form and a comprehensive written exam. For more on the RCE designation, visit REALTOR.org/RCE.



Amy Aschenbrenner, RCE, Longmont Association of REALTORS®, Colo.



Cathy Crossfield, RCE, Hampton Roads REALTORS®, Association, Va.



Roxann Dunno, RCE, West Central Association of REALTORS®, Ohio



Lynda Fernandez, RCE, Miami Association of REALTORS®, Fla.



Suzanne Frazier, RCE, Aspen/Greenwood Springs MLS, Colo.



Guyla Greenly, RCE, Wyoming Association of REALTORS®



Shelley Heck, RCE, Pen-Mar Regional Association of REALTORS®, Md.



Diane Larsen, RCE, Atascadero Association of REALTORS®, Calif.



Veronica Precella, RCE, Boulder Area REALTORS®, Association, Colo.



Laura Stroman Crowther, RCE, Coastal Carolinas Association, S.C.



Brian Toohey, RCE, Columbia Board of REALTORS®, Mo.



Johnny Wilson, RCE, Wichita Falls Association of REALTORS®, Texas



3 Steps to be an MVP!

Take Action and Win with the Member Value Plus (MVP) program. Learn how you and your members can benefit from this valuable program in three simple steps.

- 1 Take part in the **August AE MVP Action** — In August, update your Member Center profile and receive a free customizable PDF through the Print on Demand program. Check back every month for other great AE offers.
- 2 Visit the "Share and Promote" page online to download the **2013 Comprehensive MVP Fact Sheet** and other ways to promote the MVP program to your members.
- 3 Leverage the **twice monthly Sneak Peek emails** to increase your MVP participation — and for your members.

Going to Leadership Summit? Get a bonus reward!

Stop by the NAR Resource table at Leadership Summit and get a **FREE 2013 National Association of REALTORS® membership card** when you ask to find out how many members of your Association are taking advantage of the MVP program.





What's Your VALUE?

Associations Strive to Define the Value of Membership

Many of your members don't really know what you do or why. At least this is what Doug Rotthaus, CEO of the Omaha Area Board of REALTORS® in Nebraska, uncovered during the first stage of his value proposition development. And he's probably not alone.

"We conducted focus groups and research with top-producing agents and found some of them really didn't know what the association was all about," says Rotthaus. "One referred to us as the 'club,' and several showed confusion between the state association and the real estate commission." This intel outlined some important voids to fill in the association's communications, he says.

Uncovering what members think the value of your association is and what they believe it provides is the first step in crafting a member-centric way to express why they should be members. It's called a value proposition, and it was a marketing industry tool for more than a decade before migrating into association management. It's a promise to members detailing how the benefits they receive in exchange for their

dues investment will enhance their businesses and careers.

A value proposition is the member's rationale for choosing his or her association over another or none at all, says Melynn Sight, a consultant who has helped many associations develop value propositions.

"The process of developing a value proposition forces you to evaluate your services and communications with members from the members' point of view," says Sight. "This is a significant shift for many organizations and one that can create meaningful dialogue about current and new member services."

"But we already list our benefits of membership"

Although most REALTOR® associations have a benefits brochure or a Web page listing all the products, services, discounts, events, and programs that come with membership, a value proposition goes beyond presenting the benefits of membership.

"A value proposition is more than what you get. It's almost intangible," explains Sheila Dodson, executive director



by Carolyn Schwaar

of Coastal Association of REALTORS® in Maryland. “It’s the problem solving for the member that you do. It’s a description of how we answer their needs and communicating value in such a way that they understand what they receive.”

For example, you may believe that members understand the value of educational courses, but, in fact, many members fail to connect the dots between education and making more sales. This is where your value proposition comes in. The value of educational courses is gaining knowledge that will make members better professionals and lead to career success. The value is what members get out of the benefit.

Members can appreciate this notion because they do it in their business all the time. They don’t just help families find the right house with the right number of bedrooms at the right price; they highlight the value of home ownership, the sense of being part of a community, the investment in the future, and the home as an expression of the owners’ identity.

Why you need a value proposition

If you’ve gone on a broker office visit and chatted with a roomful of young real estate agents about all the association does for them, their businesses, home buyers, home sellers, and the community, you can practically hear their collective, “Oh, now I get it!” Yet because you can’t always reach all your members and potential members with your explanation of the true importance of membership, your value proposition (printed or posted) can do that for you. It is especially effective when included with your dues bill. As Dodson explains: “Last week, a member popped into my office and told me, ‘When we received our dues bills in the mail, we used to question why we paid them. Thanks to you, we now know what we get from [the Coastal Association of REALTORS®]. Now we don’t have to question it.’”

Crafting the value proposition

A single value proposition can be applied to the entire association, or several value propositions can be developed for specific programs or products. They can also be developed for specific audiences, such as brokers or young professionals.

But before you take your list of membership benefits and start detailing its broader value, look at the value position toolkit that a workgroup of 17 REALTOR® AEs spent two years developing. The toolkit, online at REALTOR.org*, guides you through this enlightening and somewhat complex process and covers a range of steps, from who should be involved in crafting the value proposition to how to communicate it to the membership. Yet if you’re not sold on the value of this process just yet, you’re not alone.

“Until I went through the process with my association, I don’t think I really understood the whole concept,” says Dodson, vice chairwoman of the work group that developed the toolkit.

Convening a group of volunteers and staff to sit down and talk about programs, services, and member needs sounds much like strategic planning or program auditing. But, as opposed to a strategic plan (which details your organization’s goals and how it will allocate resources to achieve them) or a mission statement (which describes the core purpose of your association), a value proposition is about how the association fulfills members’ needs. “It’s the outside-in perspective,” says Sight. “A value proposition articulates what members need most and links those concerns to relevant products and services offerings that the association delivers.”

For example, the Coastal association’s Web site doesn’t simply list technology classes as a membership value; it says it provides members with “technology readiness, be-

Continued on page 14

A value proposition:

- Finishes the statement: Our members joined because . . .
- Appeals to members’ strongest decision-making drivers (what’s good for my business, what’s good for my career)
- Is believable, authentic, and 100 percent accurate
- Is specific (as much as possible in a brief statement)
- Addresses many, if not all, of the forms of value: quality, convenience, price, trust, image, time, and safety.

A value proposition isn’t:

- A mission statement or association “tag line”
- Aspirational
- A laundry list of services

Source: Ken Esthus, Marketing General Inc.; and Tracy Taylor, Natural Products Foundation

* REALTOR.org/ae/manage-your-association/value-positioning-toolkit

Sample Membership Value proposition:

Membership in the [X] Association of REALTORS® helps real estate professionals become more efficient, more effective, more innovative, and more profitable. We want you to be fully equipped to take on the challenges of today's real estate marketplace so that you and your customers can enjoy a brighter tomorrow. Through our members-only classes on everything from real estate apps to negotiating, our discounts on key business products and services that you use every day, and our extensive networking and leadership opportunities, we are confident that we can prepare you for greater success in this profession like no other organization in the world. Are you ready to join us?

CarolinaHome.com Value Proposition

Your home search begins at CarolinaHome.com and ends in your new home.

- Connect to a “no-pressure” home search — Come and browse; no registration required.
- Connect to local market data — We update every 15 minutes!
- Connect to the community — Match your interests to area demographics.
- Connect to accurate information — We stand behind our data.
- Connect to a trusted professional — Carolina REALTORS® abide by a code of ethics that goes beyond what's required by law.
- Connect to your future home.

If your location is the Carolina region, begin your home search at the local resource that offers current and trustworthy property information—and is the first choice of sellers to promote their properties. At CarolinaHome.com, our goal is to connect home sellers and home buyers by connecting both to REALTORS®.

Continued from page 13

cause knowing the right technology and how to use it gives you more effective ways to service your customers.”

“It’s a whole different way of communicating,” says Dodson. “It’s a big change in how you articulate what you do for members.”

Learning to think like a member comes from your value surveys and workshops. The value positioning exercise involves directly asking members what they value and how valuable certain association services are to them, and then using that feedback to shape your argument that will make members see your offerings in a new, more valued, light.

For example, brokers may say they value “the long-term health of the market” and not connect that to “political advocacy,” notes Sight. “Being educated about what’s going on politically is important to members, but they don’t necessarily say it that way.”

When it comes to showing the value in REALTOR® association membership, translate your programs and services into member solutions and tools.

Idaho’s Ada County Association of REALTORS® held several value-proposition member focus groups where staff presented current programs and members talked about what they wished the association offered. “What became apparent,” says Sarah Kestler, the association’s director of communications, “was that a lot of what our members want or need we already offer, and they just didn’t realize.” The association didn’t need to offer more value programs; it needed to better communicate the value of its current offerings. The resulting value proposition campaign was called “Discover ACAR.”

Claim value offered by state and national

“Realize that you’re not going to get everyone to see the value in everything you do,” says Terry Penza, CEO of the REALTORS® Association of Greater Fort Myers and the Beach in Florida, and also a member of the value positioning toolkit workgroup. “But if they see the value in many of the things you do, you’ll keep that member.”

What if your value survey uncovers a member need that your services don’t directly address? Remember, you’re not alone in your value proposition. Your state association and the national association are also important parts of the value you offer at the local level. Don’t forget to include federal advocacy on behalf of real estate and home ownership as a feature of membership in your local association, with a value proposition explaining why it matters locally. The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® has outlined the features and values it offers here: REALTOR.org/member-benefits/value-of-membership. Yet, one proposition does not fit all. “Associations vary in their analysis of important member segments, and more important, their core competencies—areas where they excel that best match up with what their important member segments most need,” notes Sight. “If an association can’t substantiate its claim of value, it won’t be credible. It will just be a slogan.”

The touch of salesmanship that comes with communicating value in a value proposition is new to many nonprofits that set themselves apart from other companies that “sell” products or services. But today, in this economy, when members scrutinize every dollar they spend and ask what they get in return for their hundreds of dollars in dues, your value proposition is your answer. ■



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Convey VALUE

How Associations Deliver the Value Message to Members



It's not enough to be valuable. Associations must convince others of their value, and that happens through clear, consistent, and pervasive communications.

Last year, the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® created a member value campaign (A) for the state's 50 local REALTOR® associations that highlighted 12 values of membership, from political advocacy to education. Local associations customized campaign materials, including print and electronic postcards, with their own logos to use in their areas.

"The idea of creating something for the local associations came out of our strategic plan, which set our primary customer as the local association," says Kim Shindle, the PAR's media relations manager. "We held a focus group with AEs to get their input on the values, and then created different talking points for them to choose from."

From e-mail and social media to video and even print, the channels and opportunities to market your value are vast.

The Virginia Association of REALTORS® (B) created a series of value ads for its core services—from the legal resources center to home-sales reports—conceived by staff and produced by an outside advertising firm. "We believe that the consistent placement of the ads across multiple channels serves as a general awareness campaign; a member might see one in our Common-

wealth magazine, then see a similar one in the online newsletter or cross-promoted in a targeted e-mail," says Amanda Arwood, vice president of marketing and communications. "Over time, recognition of the service begins to sink in and reinforce the overall value of the association."

The Illinois Association of REALTORS® uses the theme "Fighting for You" in its advertisements (C) across all communications to show in pictures and words that IAR's value is that it fights for members' real estate business and clients' homeownership rights, says Ann Londrigan, the association's director of member and association engagement.

Word-of-mouth value marketing

Word of mouth today is no longer just face-to-face meetings; it's also social networking. What members say about the value of membership on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn has an important effect on what others think.

Members explaining the value of their membership is your most powerful marketing tool. For this reason, it's essential to have value proposition buy-in from elected leadership and key members, since they will be your association's most effective champions. The Houston Association of REALTORS® uses member quotes in a sec-

by Carolyn Schwaar

tion online* that highlights the value that they receive from particular products and services. Similarly, the North Shore-Barrington Association of REALTORS® in Illinois includes a testimonials page** on its Web site that features unsolicited member feedback on classes and services. One member even detailed why she chose NSBA over another association.

Member testimony via video is even more effective in swaying opinions because it better conveys emotion and authenticity.

The Southeast Minnesota Association of REALTORS® filmed a commercial featuring members at the Minnesota Capitol, city halls, county commissioner meetings, and other locations fighting for homeowners' rights. The television ad campaign (D) with the tagline "Whether or not you ever buy another home, REALTORS® have your back—Southeast Minnesota Association of REALTORS®, making Minnesota home," will air this summer on two television stations that cover all 11 counties of the state.

The commercial's goals are not only to help the consumer understand the value of a REALTOR® beyond the purchase and sale of their home, says Karen Becker, CEO of the Southeast Minnesota association, but also to show members how the association fights for their visibility in the community and protects property owners' rights, which are the foundation of the local market.

Don't scrap the benefits brochure

Although communicating value is more powerful than listing programs and services, that doesn't mean that you should throw out your benefits brochure. Your association's tools and services are examples of how you deliver on your value proposition, so it's still essential to keep them front and center in members' minds.

The Portland Metropolitan Association of REALTORS® in Oregon distributes its four-page member benefits and value brochure (E) with dues mailings and posts it online, where it has gotten more than 1,500 views, says Elizabeth Coffey, director of communications. ■

* <http://www.harconnect.com/2012/02/02/what-members-are-saying-about-bar/>

** <http://www.nsbar.org/testimonials/list>



Suburban West REALTORS® Association, Pa., value promotion



San Mateo County Association of REALTORS®, Calif., advocacy promotion

Value Calculators

Another effective way to communicate value is to lay it out in dollars and cents. Assign dollar values to your products and services (in addition to those your members receive from their state and national association) and contrast the total dollar value to the dues members pay. The Massachusetts Association of REALTORS® and the National Association of REALTORS® offer online calculators (REALTOR.org/member-benefits/member-value-calculator) that enable members to check off the programs they use and add up their dollar value. For example, a nonmember subscription to REALTOR® Magazine costs \$56 but is free for members. The Charleston Trident Association of REALTORS® in South Carolina tells members visiting its Web site***: "The cost of your membership is about \$1 per day, but the benefits are priceless. It's estimated your REALTOR® membership is worth upwards of \$15,000 per year—if you take advantage of it!"

*** www.charlestonrealtors.com/membership-mls/realtor-membership/membership-benefits/



Massachusetts Association of REALTORS®, value promotion

Shared VALUE

Double Your Value Without Increasing Your Budget

As today's discussions about relevancy, member value, and lowering costs without diminishing services go round and round, we're left wondering: How do we do it all, while becoming lean and fit organizations?

One of the most effective, and overlooked, methods of providing real value while streamlining services is collaborating with other associations. "What?!" you ask, "Aren't they my competitors?!"

Although many associations compete for members, and often provide a similar list of services, programs, and products, keep in mind that not everyone has the same strengths.

Sharing services is a time-tested, but infrequently used, approach that gives more to members without exhausting associations.

For example: Your association is recognized for delivering quality classroom education programs while a nearby association has invested in technology for delivering online education (but members aren't participating because the content doesn't meet their needs).

What a marriage?! By combining the popular classes (speakers and content) with the technical delivery, more members from both associations are likely to attend the live classes and participate in online webinars. Members get more education delivered the way they want it, and you and your partner association get more income and happier members. In short: added value without added work.

Another example is sharing staff. The Illinois Association of REALTORS® shares government affairs directors with the state's local associations. IAR hires

and pays the salary, but the GADs work at the local associations. (Sometimes, the local pays a separate bonus for extra or unique services beyond their GAD duties.) This arrangement not only enables small associations to have their local issues represented at the state capital, but also provides them the benefit of having staff explain the value of political advocacy to members.

There are infinite ways to cooperate with your neighbors, or even those further away with virtual means (and needs). There are also many opportunities to share with community organizations that have similar goals, such as your builders association, chamber of commerce, homeless shelters, or banks.

It's one thing to come up with a great sharing opportunity; it's quite another to launch it.

You have the staff, funding, and leadership personalities of two or more associations to coordinate. Not to mention written agreements, verbal commitments, sharing committees, and—let's not forget—the fair division of labor. There are many aspects at play that can sink a great idea before it even gets a chance to prove itself.

For this reason, NAR's Association Leadership Development department recently revised its shared services resources. The improved resources will guide you through a series of simple-to-follow steps in assessing your strengths and the strengths of your programs. Once that assessment is complete, you can connect with others who may complement your services.

The new shared services resources, which I had the pleasure of working with NAR on, address fundamental issues, such as the notion that one association offering to share is really trying to "take you over" or get you to merge. I've found this is not the case in most instances. On the other hand, the guide also covers using sharing as a trial for a potential merger if that topic has been considered, giving each association a chance to see how that cooperation can work.

From my experience as an AE and working in NAR's Association Leadership Development department, I've learned that when associations can and do overcome the "we're different than they are and we do things our own way" attitude, there is an overall commonality in purpose—to do what's best to help members succeed. I've seen ego and jealousy overcome by identifying joint goals that were then reached through the right attitudes, timing, and good communication. Remember that it's all about offering relevant programs and services that provide more member value. No need to do it alone! ■

New Shared Services Toolkit & Workshop

NAR's revised Shared Services Toolkit has other examples and recommended steps to get you where you want to go. Another benefit of this resource is that it gives you the option of undertaking this project and related assessments on your own or hiring an objective and independent facilitator if that works best for your situation.

Visit REALTOR.org/ae/manage-your-association/shared-services to access the toolkit, or contact Cindy Sampalis at csampalis@realtors.org for more information about conducting a Shared Services Workshop in your area soon.

NAR's Member Guide has a **new look** and **name** **NAR's Member Center**

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REALTOR® Party

Associations Join in Public Transit Planning



Joe Molinaro is the managing director of Community and Political Affairs at the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in Washington, D.C. He can be reached at jmolinaro@realtors.org.

REALTORS® have always known that accessible and efficient public transportation boosts property values and encourages development. Especially today with gas prices, congestion, and environmental

concerns making cars a less desirable way to get around, REALTOR® associations see growing value in actively supporting public transportation projects that connect people to jobs, services, and each other. Several REALTOR® associations have made good use of REALTOR® Party Initiative grants and services to not only improve their communities but also highlight REALTORS® as key players in important community issues.

Connecting commuters and communities

The Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS® (MIBOR) is part of a coalition beating the drum for Indy Connect, a long-range transportation plan for Indianapolis and Central Indiana, that includes light rail and bus rapid transit.

“It all comes down to keeping our region competitive and enhancing the overall quality of life,” says Chris Pryor, the association’s government affairs director. “Ultimately, that’s what’s going to drive the success of our real estate market and the success of our individual REALTORS®.”

Assisted by an Issues Mobilization grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, MIBOR and other coalition partners lobbied the state legislature to put a referendum on the ballot that would create a local funding source to help build and operate the Indy Connect system. Their goal is to seek voter approval for an income tax hike of .03 percent in fall 2014.

“It’s been a huge benefit to our association to work with the coalition,” Pryor reflects. “It’s positioned us as being a leader on a major issue that’s very important to Central Indiana.”

Combating sprawl through better connections

The Denver Metro Area REALTORS® (DMAR) helped pass a sales tax increase back in 2004 to expand the

Regional Transportation District’s existing transit system. The first phase of the expansion, a new light rail line between Denver and Golden, called the West Rail Line, began carrying passengers in April 2013. During construction, DMAR teamed up with the Denver Regional Council of Governments to sponsor a tour and seminar for REALTORS® and elected officials to raise awareness about the development potential of rail corridors.

“We were very active in land-use planning for the West Rail Line corridor,” says Susan Aldretti, government affairs director for DMAR. “People realize we need to create more dense development in our inner-ring suburbs because we can’t continue to sprawl outward.”


Aldretti calls the West Rail Line an “economic engine” that is both generating new housing and attracting new employers, including a hospital and a company headquarters. “Any time you increase the number of jobs, you increase the number of people buying homes in the community,” she explains.

Eventually the region will need to raise the sales tax again to fund additional system expansions. DMAR asked NAR to conduct a poll on its behalf to determine if the public would support an increase. The poll, a service provided by NAR’s campaign services department, revealed the increase would likely not be approved at this time. NAR then offered guidance on what steps would make approval more likely in the future, information DMAR shared with key decision-makers in the region.

That kind of collaboration “increases the value of REALTORS® as participants in decisions in the community,” Aldretti says. “When issues come up, you have more influence.”

Getting out in front of the growth

The Utah County Association of REALTORS® (UCAR) considered it a “no-brainer” to support plans to ex-



“We want to help drive the kind of smart growth concepts that REALTORS® support. If you grow in a sophisticated way, you’re buying and selling higher value properties and you’re improving the quality of life for everyone.”

— Taylor Oldroyd, CEO,
Utah County Association of REALTORS®

tend the region’s FrontRunner commuter rail line 45 miles south from Salt Lake City to Provo, says Taylor Oldroyd, chief executive officer.

“There’s a lot of open ground around the new rail stations and there’s going to be a lot of development there. We want to help drive the kind of smart growth concepts that REALTORS® support,” Oldroyd explains. “If you grow in a sophisticated way, you’re buying and selling higher value properties and you’re improving the quality of life for everyone.”

Shortly before the extended line opened late last year, UCAR sponsored an open house that brought together more than 100 stakeholders to learn more about what to expect when the trains began running. The association also published a series of print ads to promote the line. Through the REALTOR® Party, NAR awarded UCAR a Smart Growth Initiative grant to support both efforts.

UCAR will apply for another REALTOR® Party grant to sponsor a series of planning sessions in order to help create a vision for development up and down the new line. “Our role is education, leadership, and awareness,” Oldroyd reflects. “The idea is to get out in front of the growth.”

Connecting people to job centers

The Maine Commercial Association of REALTORS® (MCAR) is a key player in an effort to establish a rail

connection between the state’s two largest population centers—Portland and Auburn/Lewiston. Using 30 miles of idle track, the Smart Growth Mobility Project—Maine Rail Transit Coalition is working to connect people to job centers.

“Maine is very rural and our economic development options are limited. We see this as an opportunity for growth,” says Suzanne Guild, executive officer for MCAR.

As planning and financing efforts for the proposed line continue, MCAR secured a Smart Growth Grant from the REALTOR® Party that allowed the coalition to complete an important study and seek important changes in state transportation funding policies. “Our role in the coalition has enabled our REALTORS® to partner with people they haven’t partnered with in the past, such as the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations,” Guild says.

Maine residents have already shown their thirst for rail by flocking to a new Amtrak route between Portland and Boston. “REALTORS® are in tune with what their community needs,” Guild comments. “Our involvement in the Maine Rail Transit Coalition shows REALTORS® are part of the solution.”

If these stories resonate with you, please visit us online for further information and NAR staff contacts at REALTORactioncenter.com/realtor-party/tools-and-resources/mrp/. ■



Grants & Programs

Visit REALTORactioncenter.com for a list of grants, programs, resources, success stories and downloadable materials to help you in your smart growth, political advocacy, housing opportunity, diversity, and other initiatives.

Law & Policy

Your Part in Defending the Marks



Katherine Johnson is an associate counsel at NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in Chicago. She can be reached at kjohnson@realtors.org.

A valuable benefit of membership in the REALTOR® organization is being able to use the REALTOR® trademark. Consumer awareness campaigns at the local, state, and national level promote the value

of using a REALTOR® and the difference between REALTORS® and real estate agents who are not members of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®.

Yet, in order to maintain the value and importance of the mark, REALTOR® associations must actively protect the mark by promoting its proper use and correcting misuses. If the REALTOR® organization didn't actively defend its trademark and allowed it to become generic, it would become harder if not impossible to enforce its proper use as identifying a member of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®.

To maintain the value and importance of the mark, REALTOR® associations must actively protect the mark by promoting its proper use and correcting misuses.

with their name and with the name of their business (e.g., www.judismith-realtor.com or eliteexecutive.realtors.com). The rules specifically prohibit members from using any descriptive terms in connection with the mark.

Educate members to avoid confusion

There are several good reasons why members are restricted as to how they can use the REALTOR® trademark, and simply being made aware of these reasons has led to increased compliance by members. First, in order to protect the federal trademark registration, the mark must be used only to serve its purpose of identifying members. Using the mark for any other purpose—for example, using it to refer to real estate agents in general—is outside the scope of its meaning and may weaken our ability to maintain trademark protection.

Further, REALTOR® means “member of NAR” and all members of NAR are REALTORS®. Other than the membership class called “International REALTOR®” and the new “Student Member”*, NAR does not have different classifications of membership. That is why it is improper to use a descriptive term in connection with the term REALTOR®. For example, NAR does not have membership classes for “commercial”, “green,” “diversity,” or “second-home” REALTORS®. Therefore, using such descriptive terms is improper and may lend itself toward incorrectly being interpreted to mean “real estate professional” generally. For example, members should not use slogans in their marketing like these: “Miami’s top-producing second-home REALTOR®” or “Live in concert with your environment with a green REALTOR®.”

NAR has established a comprehensive Trademark Protection Program that is designed to ensure that the REALTOR® trademark is used only by or in reference to members of NAR and state and local associa-

Did you know: The rules that define the proper use of “REALTOR®” in a domain name also apply to e-mail addresses, user names and URL extensions on Facebook, Blogger, and other social media sites.

Last year alone, NAR’s trademark administrator received nearly 400 complaints from members about misuses of the trademark. The great majority of those complaints pertained to members who were violating NAR rules by using a geographic description in connection with the term REALTOR®. For example, a member located in Chicago may have obtained the domain name bestchicago.realtor.com or smithchicagorealtor.com.

Those examples are both improper uses of the trademark because a descriptive term, Chicago, is being used to modify REALTOR®. Members may use the REALTOR® trademark only in connection





NAR and many state associations worked in concert earlier this year to shut down the Web site www.realtor-complaints.com that was misusing the REALTOR® trademark, posting false complaints about real estate practitioners, and demanding money to have the complaints removed from the site.



tions and to ensure that all uses are proper in form and context. Because NAR believes that voluntary compliance is the most beneficial and cost-effective way of protecting and maintaining the REALTOR® trademark, in addition to its education program, NAR has implemented a written cease-and-desist process to encourage compliance by misusers. However, if compliance or a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached, NAR will initiate a complaint against a member with his or her local association or take legal action as necessary. For example, in 2012 NAR filed a complaint with the World Intellectual Property Organization over the domain name gayrealtor.com after its owner declined to stop using the URL. NAR was awarded ownership of the domain.

When necessary, NAR has been successful in obtaining court orders against infringers ordering that they cease and desist misuse of the trademarks and, in many cases, pay NAR damages relating to the infringement and costs associated with

the lawsuit, including attorneys' fees. In addition to other legal actions NAR may pursue, NAR may file a Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy complaint against an individual or company that is misusing a mark in a domain name, which may result in mandatory transfer of the infringing domain to NAR.

Locals have an essential role

State and local associations also have the duty to police and enforce proper use of the trademark. NAR bylaws require each association to cooperate and coordinate with NAR in any and all attempts to halt or prevent any unauthorized or improper use of the REALTOR® trademark. Associations are responsible for ensuring that their members use the trademark in compliance with the license set forth in the NAR

Constitution and bylaws and the policies and guidelines set forth in the Membership Marks Manual. To achieve this, each association should assist in familiarizing its members with the policies and guidelines

NAR sends out more than 2,000 letters a year notifying members and nonmembers that their domain name violates NAR's rules.

in the manual by conducting education sessions for current members and by covering this topic in new member orientation. The manual also contains sample letters associations may use to contact misusers of the trademark. Often, members do not intend to break the rules. They just weren't aware of them. That is where the state and locals can be most effective.

Recently, NAR updated the manual into an easy-to-read-and-access format available at www.REALTOR.org/mmm. The trademark rules have not changed, but their accessibility to members and association staff has greatly improved. The manual also incorporates the specific guidelines and application of the rules regarding use of the trademarks on the Internet and specifically in social media. The updated manual also contains links to the educational and entertaining trademark videos and sample letters to help association executives with their own trademark protection efforts.

The goals of NAR's Trademark Protection Program are to preserve the federal trademark registration, create and increase the value of goodwill, and maintain the original intended purpose and meaning of the REALTOR® trademark for the benefit of all members. In order to achieve these goals, members must be made aware of the rules governing their use of the trademark and misuses of trademark must be recognized, identified, and corrected. ■

In 2012 a British company announced the launch of its new marketing tool, Realtor Smart Apps, to the U.S. market. Their press release was met with a letter from NAR. The company said it was unaware that REALTOR® was a member mark and promptly changed the name of its product to Realty Smart Apps.



Small Board

Tap Into NAR's Value

My small association, like so many others, went through some belt-tightening over the past few years that made us refocus our offerings on what our members say they need and value most.



Amy DuBose, RCE, E-PRO, is the association executive with the San Marcos Area Board of REALTORS®, Texas. She can be reached at 512-396-5478 or amy@smabor.com.

Unfortunately, that left some areas that I feel are really important—such as smart growth, housing opportunity, and local legislative advocacy—relatively unfunded. We don't have the resources to devote to educating members on these topics or to put behind grassroots community development programs.

Luckily, the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® offers some free assistance that enables us to not only educate our members but also claim our seat at the table when important growth, housing, and legislative issues arise in our community.

Grants to host smart growth programs

In 2012, my association applied for the Tier 1 Smart Growth Grant through NAR. I was shocked by how easy the process was. We received a \$1,500 grant and used it to host a four-hour continuing-education

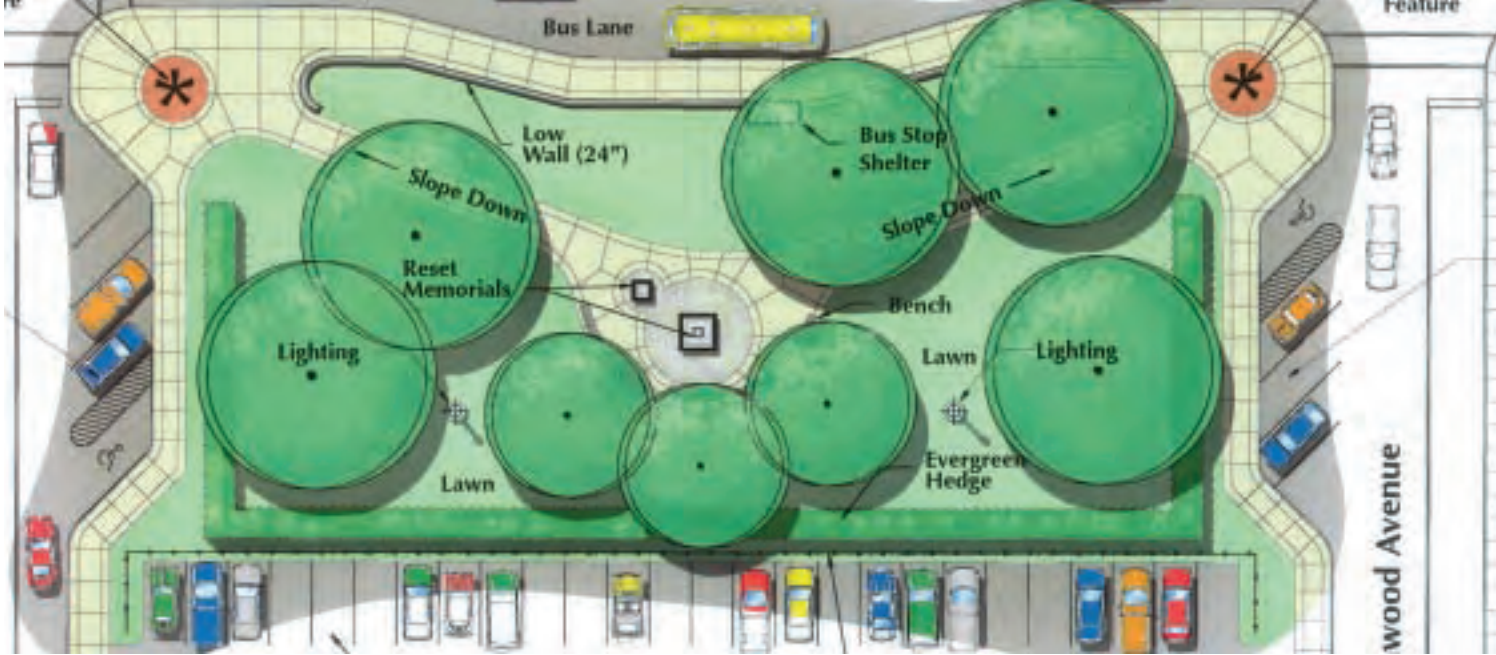
course designed by NAR, called "Smart Growth in the 21st Century." We offered it to members for free and the response was outstanding. Members really valued the opportunity to learn about this topic and how it could affect our community's growth in the future (no doubt they also appreciated the free CE credit). We now plan to apply for a Tier 2 Smart Growth Grant for up to \$5,000 to launch a daylong symposium about smart growth and development for our entire community, including local organizations and policy makers. Through these offerings, we're able to position the REALTOR® organization as the go-to resource for this type of information.

Another really simple way we've been able to stay visible on smart growth is by giving our local planning and zoning commissioners and city council members the *On Common Ground* magazine that NAR publishes.

NAR's four-hour "Employer-Assisted Housing" class or the six-hour "Expanding Housing Opportunities" class can be offered to members for free with a Housing Opportunity grant.



An example of an affordable housing development plan: Eden Housing, Hayward, Calif.



Example of a smart growth development plan: Fayetteville Street corridor, Durham, N.C. Courtesy Fayetteville Street Group.

On Common Ground is a free, semi-annual magazine that presents a wide range of views on smart growth issues with the goal of encouraging dialogue among REALTORS®, elected officials, and other interested citizens. Sharing this content builds bridges between our organizations and lets community leaders know that we are in favor of responsible growth.

Grants to host housing opportunity programs

A grant through the Housing Opportunity Program, funded by the national association, offers another chance to provide value to our members. The grant program provides local and state associations with up to \$5,000 to put on any type of housing event or program. Associations can also apply for a grant up to \$1,000 to host either a four-hour “Employer-Assisted Housing” class or a six-hour “Expanding Housing Opportunities” class, which are both developed by NAR. Some time very soon, we hope to apply for this grant to fund a housing fair.

Even though I know a local housing fair would provide great opportunities for consumers in my area to learn the innerworkings of real estate and boost the profile of my members, right now we do not have the volunteer or staff manpower to put on a program, even with the funding. Small associations like mine need to plan far in advance and select our events carefully so we don’t overburden our volunteers.

Grants to sponsor legislative advocacy

You have, no doubt, heard about NAR’s Issues Mobilization opportunities and the funding available to local and state associations. This is a great opportunity to make a significant difference in your community. Funding for political and legislative advocacy campaigns can range from a few thousand dollars to upwards of \$100,000. The application require-

ments vary based on the amount requested and your proposed project.

My association received issues mobilization funds to help combat negative forces who were fighting a road bond package that would finance engineering, design services, and construction for up to five road projects in our county. I applied for funds through the Texas Association of REALTORS®. The issues mobilization committee then determined there was time to get matching funds from the national association. When the funds were approved, we used them to pay for direct advertising to the public to vote for the bond package in the elections. We communicated the importance of the bond effort to our members via all channels we use (social media, e-mail, luncheons, and face-to-face contact) and we made them aware that we had received issues mobilization funds for this program. Members are keenly aware that a portion of their dues are earmarked for political advocacy, so we were eager to show that some of that came home to our county for this important fight, which we ultimately won!

Free member information to repurpose

Lastly, NAR provides me with great information on a variety of topics I can use in my member communications. Not only do I summarize the national association’s press releases posted on REALTOR.org but I also link to the blog posts at REALTOR.org that cover a wide range of topics—from research and education to technology. There are also blogs for specific real estate concentrations. These blogs can be shared with your members easily through your newsletter or via social media. When you don’t have to reinvent the wheel to keep members informed, you save time.

Being small with limited staff and budget does not mean that you have to offer members less value. Resources are available; you just have to tap into them. ■

“We now plan to apply for a Tier 2 Smart Growth Grant for up to \$5,000 to launch a daylong symposium about smart growth and development for our entire community, including local organizations and policy makers.”

Show Me the Value

Showing membership value boils down to one idea, says Annemarie Howard, CEO of the Charlotte Regional REALTOR® Association and the CarolinaMLS: “Members want to see how

their dollars are at work.”

To this end, the Charlotte Association launched an online Membership Value Calculator, which is similar to the National Association’s, but highlights only local association offerings. “Members can easily see which offerings they use and put a dollar figure on that savings,” says Howard. “More important, they can see which offerings they don’t use but should be using to get the most value out of their membership.”

However a value calculator alone isn’t enough to express value, especially if the members don’t take advantage of those offerings, Howard says. “In addition, an association needs to deliver a value proposition [see p. 12], which describes how what we offer is unique from what others offer.”

For example, Charlotte’s value proposition highlights how its real estate school boasts an impressive array of instructors and a variety of timely classes, while others don’t. “Our mediation and arbitration services can save members time and thousands of dollars, and our local dues are less than most comparably sized associations,” says Howard. “Isn’t that what people want to know?”

Yet, the challenge remains for the Charlotte Association to demonstrate the value of being a member aside from the requirement to do so in order to access the MLS, says Howard. “The REALTOR® association provides so much value, but that value often gets lost because members are hyper-focused on the listing system.”

Growing appreciation for advocacy

Howard sees progress being made in members appreciating the value of association political advocacy. As a former Washington, D.C., lobbyist herself, Howard is keenly attuned to the importance of her association’s role to advocate for home ownership on behalf of REALTORS® and their buyer and seller clients.

Calls for action, tracking and influencing local issues, along with candidate questionnaires and interviews, have become increasingly important to members, she says. “Especially recently with the potential changes to the MID and property-tax deductions here in North Carolina, members realize that these are real issues that affect their livelihoods.”

Of course, what members value changes over time prompting associations to develop and sunset programs. “Well before the recession started, we realized that the credibility of real estate professionals was at stake,” says Howard. “We needed to communicate to consumers the value of using a REALTOR® so they could understand how the market was changing almost daily. Once the recession hit, our message to media and consumers was deliberate; we always looked for ways to promote the value of using a REALTOR®

and the unique expertise that REALTOR® bring to the transaction.”

Today, however, now that the national and local housing markets are recovering and many REALTOR® are busier than ever, they probably view “REALTOR® value” marketing as less important, Howard says.

A higher priority today, Charlotte members indicated in a recent value proposition survey, was providing consumers with a robust REALTOR®-branded local property search. The Charlotte association launched a value proposition workgroup specifically to define the value of redesigning its property search. “The result of the workshop was a new understanding of CarolinaHome.com’s target audience and the unique offerings that differentiated it from competing sites,” says Howard.

The new home search feature to launch in 2014 is just the latest way the Charlotte association is showing members their dues dollars at work. ■

“The REALTOR® association provides so much value, but that value often gets lost because members are hyper-focused on the listing system.”



Annemarie Howard, is CEO of the Charlotte Regional REALTOR® Association, N.C., and the CarolinaMLS. Contact her at 704-372-0911 or annemarie.howard@carolinahome.com.

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