



2014

Small Membership Survey Report



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Executive Summary

We launched our inaugural Small Membership Survey in late 2012 to identify, verify and share some of the characteristics of small membership organizations. Since so much of the benchmarking research focuses on large associations and non-profits, we wanted to pinpoint the qualities and experiences that set small membership organizations apart from their larger counterparts.

Small membership organizations are very different

Our research in both 2013 and 2014 indicates that while they may share similar priorities, small membership organizations are unique in many ways – they are not simply smaller, newer versions of larger more established associations, non-profits or clubs. More than 50% of these groups are led solely by volunteers, with the rest managing with a small staff of one or two employees. While they are often resource-challenged, and reliant on membership fees (representing over 90% of their revenue), the good news is that more than half of these organizations were able to grow their membership while retaining more than 80% of their existing members in 2014.

Volunteers and staff work in isolation

But what is truly different is that the volunteers and staff of these small organizations often work in isolation, without the ability to share information, best practices and challenges with their peers. This survey report offers an opportunity to benchmark against other similar organizations in terms of budgets, membership recruitment and retention strategies, effective outreach tools and more. It also offers a forum for small membership organizations to share common questions and concerns.

In fact, the feedback we received through these surveys about the desire to share information has led us to launch a separate initiative: our [Small Membership Advisory Community](#).

The current landscape for small membership organizations

So what is the state of small membership organizations? What are their top priorities, best practices and challenges in 2014? Is their size impacting their ability to meet their mission?

Top priorities

The top three priorities for small membership organizations remain the same for 2014 as were identified in our 2013 report:

1. Increasing membership
2. Increasing member engagement
3. Demonstrating member value

This chart offers a comparison of the top three priorities as reported in 2014 and 2013.

TOP PRIORITIES	2014 REPORT	2013 REPORT
Increasing membership	20.2%	27.7%
Increasing member engagement	16.3%	22.1%
Demonstrating membership value	10.3%	15%
All of the above	26.0%	n/a

While the top three priorities for 2014 and 2013 were the same, when we looked at the full spectrum of priorities, this year, “finding new sources of revenue” was only a top priority for 3.9% versus 11.5% in 2013 – which we hope indicates a stronger financial outlook. In addition, “developing member programs and services” was only a key priority for 9.7% of respondents (down from 10.7% in 2013).

“All of the above” translates into multiple priorities

But what was different this year, was that we included a new option: “all of the above”. It is interesting to note that, over a quarter of organizations reported that they are trying to focus on multiple priorities, even at their small size and with their limited resources.

Additional priorities:

Some organizations shared top priorities that were very specific to their organization or sector, but which demonstrate the type of issues facing these small organizations, including:

- Developing a new website
- Effective advocacy
- Major donor fundraising
- Facility maintenance and long-term development
- Hiring a Director of Administration
- Attracting attendees to our annual conference

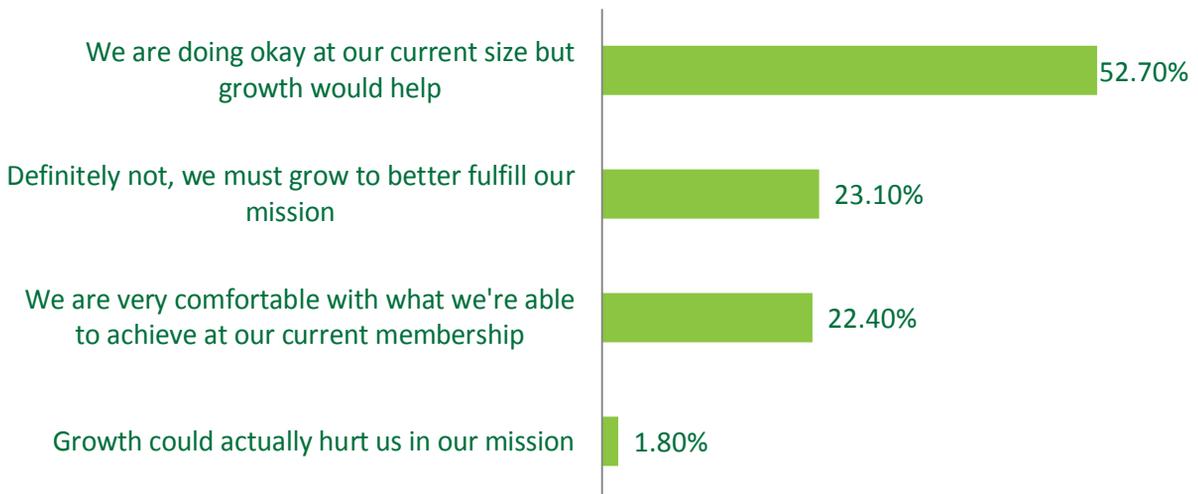
Does size matter in fulfilling their mission?

Two of the key questions we had in launching our inaugural survey were:

- *Does size matter?*
- *Can small membership organizations be successful even at their small size?*

The answers this year were almost exactly the same as in the 2013 report – with just over half of the respondents indicating that they are doing “okay” at their current size but hoping for growth. Just under a quarter of respondents are definitely hoping for growth, and another 20+ percent are achieving success at their current size.

Does Size Matter? Do you feel your organization is effectively fulfilling your mission at its current size?



What challenges are small membership organizations facing?

There were a number of recurring themes in terms of challenges and issues in the survey responses. Here are some of the key challenges that were identified:

- Being “resource-challenged” – AKA doing a lot with a little
- Board and volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention
- Enticing the younger generation to join and become involved
- Developing sources of non-dues revenue
- Technology challenges – getting board and members to use new technology

(For a full list of key topics/questions respondents wanted to ask their peers, see “What Do Association Members Want To Ask Their Peers?”)

This survey report highlights the characteristics and current state of small membership organizations, including information on member growth and retention as well as leadership and membership models. It also offers a snapshot of their financial outlook – membership fees, critical sources of revenue, as well as non-dues revenue. Finally, it offers benchmarking and best practices insight that small membership organizations can review in order to see where their organization fits in the small membership world.

Introduction

Survey Objectives

Our initial goal with the Small Membership Survey was to gather and present benchmarking data and best practices insight specific to small membership organizations – especially those which are volunteer-led or operate with a skeleton staff.

As we launched the second annual survey, our goal was to offer a similar survey in order to compare findings year-over-year on topics such as: membership growth patterns; programs and services offered; membership fee categories and rates; communications methods and marketing channels. We also included open-ended questions designed to gain insight into the top priorities, as well as key issues facing small membership organizations, in particular information and insight they'd like to find out from their peers.

In addition, based on response from survey participants last year, in the 2014 survey we added a few new survey questions on topics including:

- Methods of recruiting and retaining board members
- Effective tactics for member engagement
- Key sources of non-dues revenue

Methodology

We launched the second annual Small Membership Survey in mid-February, 2014 and it remained open to participants until mid-April, 2014. Once again this year, the survey was offered online (through SurveyMonkey). The survey was promoted through the Wild Apricot Blog, via social media, as well as through email to the subscribers of the Wild Apricot Newsletter (15,000 recipients). Respondents could participate anonymously or register – via name and email – in order to receive a copy of this report.

The 2014 survey had a total of 487 respondents. While the number of respondents was slightly higher in our 2013 report (559), we feel this is sufficient to develop some comparisons and identify trends year-over-year.

Survey Respondents and Their Organizations – A Snapshot

Before we look at the survey findings, it’s important to have a little insight into the **487** respondents and the small membership organizations they represent. Here is a quick snapshot:

- More than two-thirds of the respondents were (unpaid) volunteers in leadership roles at their organization (e.g., President/Board Chair, Executive Director)
- Just under half of the respondents were from Business/Trade or Professional Associations
- Over 80% of respondents were based in the U.S.

Volunteers, staff, or contractors?

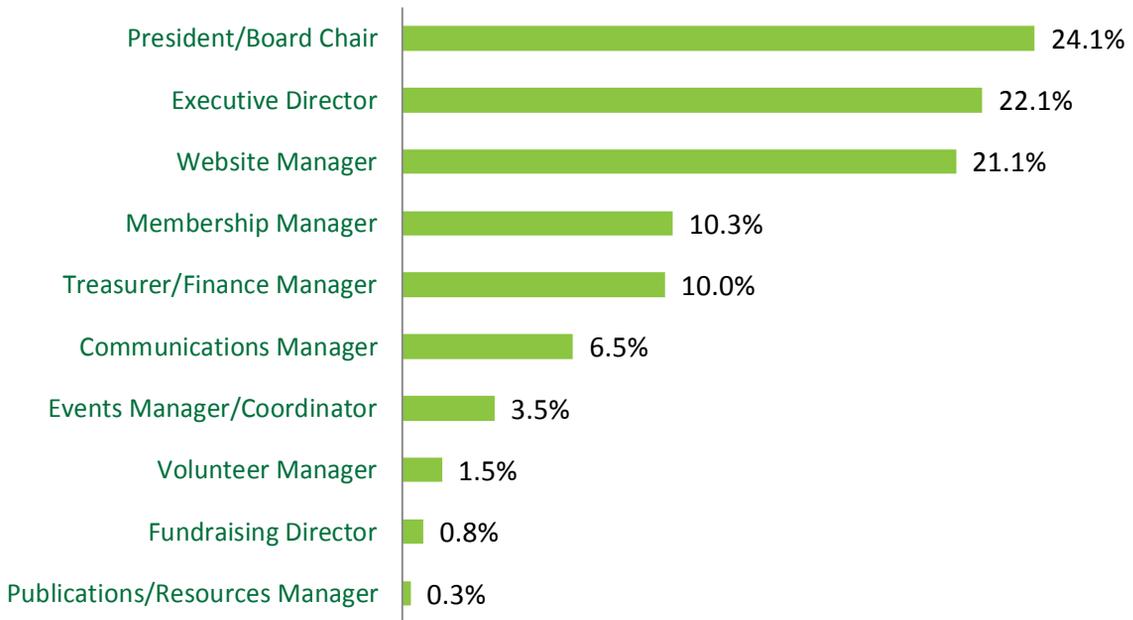
Since we know that many small organizations are led solely by volunteers, we were curious to see if our survey respondents were volunteers or paid staff. It is interesting to note that once again this year, over two-thirds of the survey participants were unpaid volunteers.

	2014 Report	2013 Report
Volunteer (unpaid)	67.1%	64%
Full-time (paid) staff or contractor	18.9%	18.3%
Part-time (paid) staff or contractor	14.0%	17.9%

What roles do they play in their organizations?

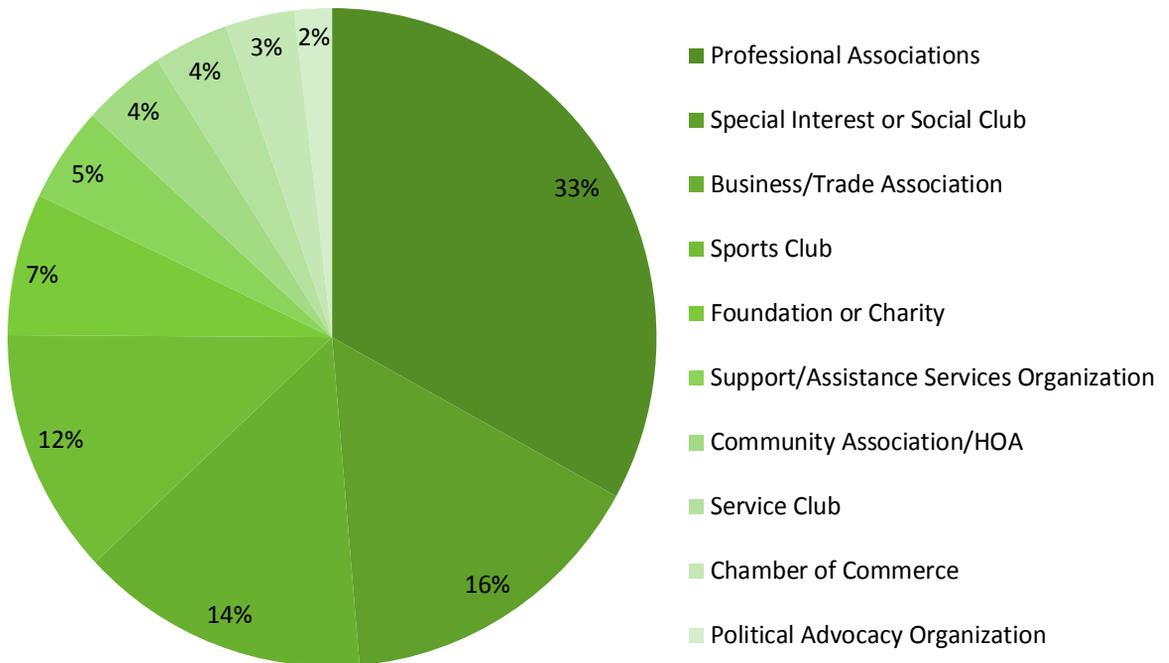
Once again this year, we found that more than two-thirds of our respondents (67.3%) hold leadership positions at their organization, such as President, Board Chair or Executive Director. In addition, more than 20% of respondents were website managers.

Which of the following best describes your position?



Types of organizations represented in the survey

While all types of small membership organizations were represented in the survey, close to half of the respondents (45.5%) were from Business/Trade or Professional Associations. The second highest response was from clubs, with 15% being from special interest or social clubs, and 11.6% from sports clubs.



Characteristics of Small Membership Organizations

In our inaugural survey last year, we developed a profile of a typical small membership organization. This year’s data has helped us develop an even clearer “portrait of a small membership organization”.

Based on our 2014 survey, a typical small membership organization...

- has fewer than 500 members
- is a stand-alone organization – with non-profit status
- is managed by a combination of volunteers and staff (1-2 full or part-time staff)
- has local or regional membership reach
- operates with a budget of under \$500,000

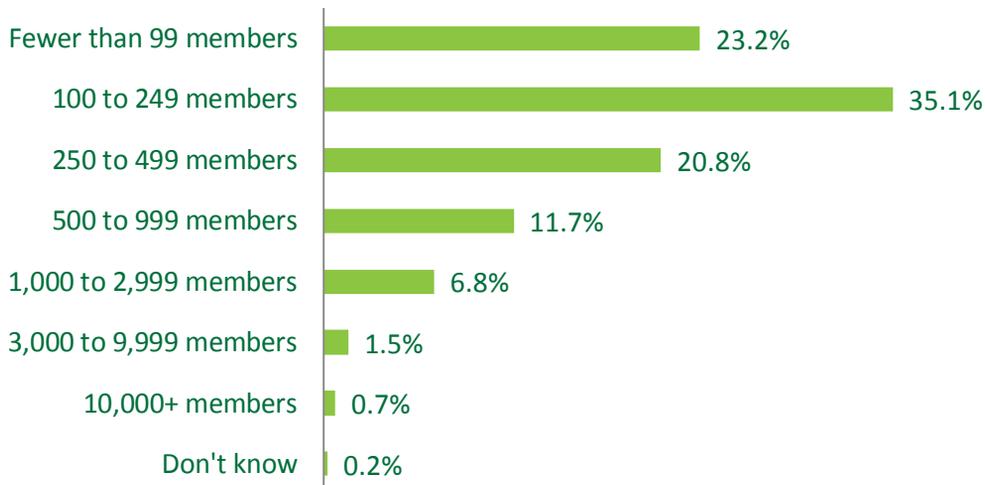
Membership size and reach

Number of members

This year, close to 80% of our respondents represented organizations with fewer than 500 members.

- Fewer than 99 members: 23.2%
- 100 - 249 members: 35.1%
- 250 to 499 members: 20.8%
- 500 to 999 members: 11.7%

What is your current membership size?



Membership reach

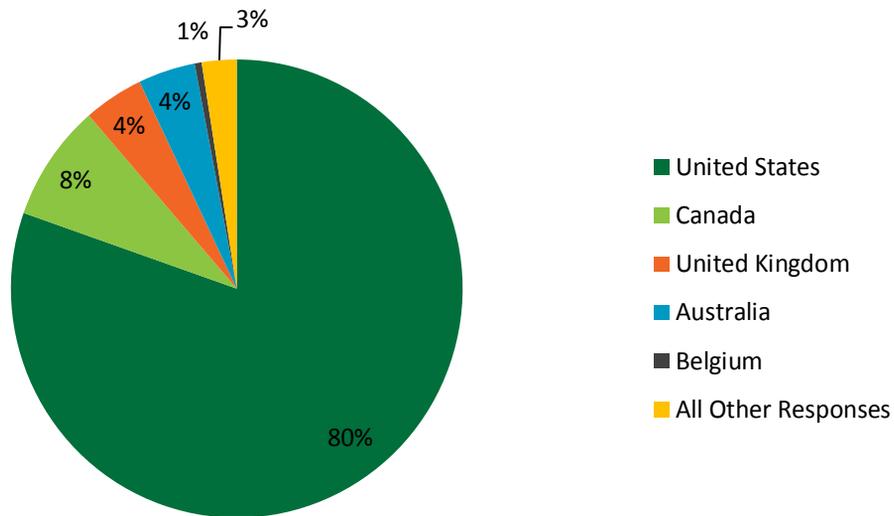
In looking at the small membership organizations' reach or scope, local and regional based organizations were well represented in the survey. However, just over 20% were international organizations.

- **Local (City / County) 34.5%**
- **Regional (State / Province) 33.1%**
- National 12.0%
- International 20.4%

Location

The majority of our survey respondents were based in the **United States (80%)**. However, we also had participants from countries such as: **Canada (8%)**, the **United Kingdom (4%)** and **Australia (4%)**.

Location of Survey Respondents



Chapters and branches

We wondered if these small groups were independent organizations or part of a larger network – e.g., a chapter or branch of a larger organization or the central office of a multi-chapter organization. The findings indicate that close to three-quarters of respondents were from “stand-alone” organizations.

- **A stand-alone organization 71.2%**
- A chapter or branch of a larger organization - 19.9%
- A single organization with multiple chapters or branches - 8.9%

Number of chapters and branches

For organizations with multiple chapters or branches, many had large networks of more than 50 chapters or branches.

- 2-9 chapters/branches: 23.1%
- **10-24** chapters/branches: **19.2%**
- 25-50 chapters/branches: 13.8%
- **more than 50** chapters/branches: **40.1%**
- Don't know: 3.8%

Non-profit Status

Just over 80% of participants had non-profit status.

- **Yes: 81.6%**
- No: 18.4%

How long have these organizations been established?

We found that very few of the organizations represented in our survey were recent start-ups. In fact, close to 80% had been established for more than 8 years.

- **8+ years 78.0%**
- 5-8 years 9.2%
- 1-4 years 8.7%
- Under 1 year 4.0%

Leadership

As noted earlier, many small membership organizations are often staffed solely by volunteers. In some cases, an organization may be started by a group of volunteers and over time, as the membership and its scope grows, the organization takes on paid staff members.

At the same time, we also know that many organizations are resource-challenged, struggling to do a lot with a little. And we've heard in our inaugural survey (as well as through our customers), that these folks want to know how other organizations are structured – e.g., how many staff do they have; how are volunteers involved and in what capacity? So we gathered some insight into leadership roles at small membership organizations.

Who manages these organizations day-to-day?

More than half of our survey respondents reported their organizations are led solely by volunteers.

- **Volunteers only 55.4%**
- Staff only 23.8%
- Combination of volunteers and staff 20.7%

Number of paid staff versus volunteers

While many organizations are led by volunteers, our survey response indicates that close to one-third have 1 to 2 full time staff, and just over a third have 1 to 2 part time staff.

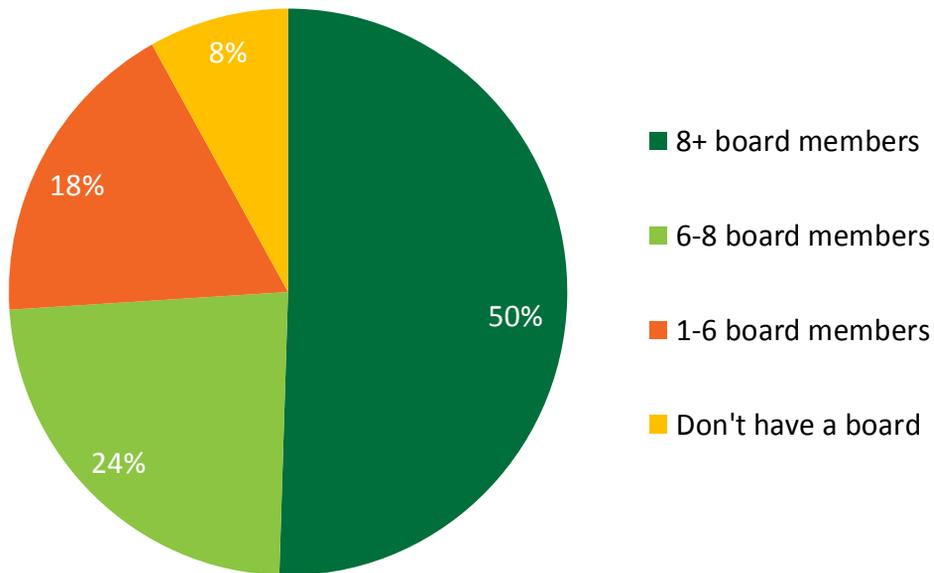
Number of Staff	Full time	Part time
0	6.2%	3.9%
1-2	28.6%	32.2%
3-5	12.1%	7.8%
6+	6.9%	2.3%
Not sure	0	0

Board of directors – size, recruitment and retention

With members of the board of directors playing such crucial roles in leading small organizations (as well as often managing the day-to-day operations), we wanted to see what the average board size might be. In addition, we asked about board recruitment and retention strategies.

Board Size

It was interesting to note that just over 50% of respondents indicated that their boards have 8 or more directors. This is substantially higher than last year’s findings. In addition, 24% have 6-8 directors.



Board recruitment and retention

After receiving numerous questions during our 2013 survey about board recruitment and retention challenges, we added the following open-ended question to the 2014 survey: *How do you attract and retain board members?*

While the most telling responses to our question included: “luck and guilt, :)”, “begging and pleading”, and “with difficulty”, there were also many ideas that survey participants offered up that might be helpful for organizations struggling with board recruitment.

Here are some of the top categories and a sampling of the verbatim suggestions for attracting and retaining board members:

- **At events:**
 - *Call for nominations at annual meeting*
 - *At conventions*
- **Recruiting existing volunteers:**
 - *Ask those who have helped at events, etc.*
 - *Getting them involved on committees, identifying future leaders, then we approach*
 - *Volunteers who have made repeated commitments to the organization.*
- **Board recruitment and appointments:**
 - *Recruit and current board members interview and vote who will be on the Board.*
 - *They are appointed by President or elected by membership.*
- **Word of mouth**
- **Nominating Committee**

Who manages what in a small membership organization?

It is interesting to note that once again this year, there was roughly a 60/40 split between roles held by volunteers versus those managed by staff or contractors. It appears that two-thirds of the organizations surveyed have volunteers managing almost every function – from finances to events and even volunteer management.

Role	Volunteer		Staff/Contractor		Don't know	
	2013	2014	2013	2014	2013	2014
Finances	64.6%	63.9%	34.6%	36.1%	0.8%	0.0%
Membership management	59.2%	62.0%	39.5%	37.8%	1.3%	0.2%
Volunteer management	65.6%	66.5%	24.7%	25.8%	9.7%	7.8%
Communications/Marketing/ PR/Social Media	62.3%	65.2%	36.6%	32.9%	1.1%	1.9%
Website	59.7%	59.6%	39.5%	40.2%	0.8%	0.2%
Events	64.6%	65.3%	34.5%	34.0%	0.9%	0.6%
Newsletter/Journal/Magazine	58.1%	63.0%	33.3%	30.2%	8.4%	6.9%
Fundraising/Sponsorship	61.9%	59.1%	27.1%	27.1%	11.0%	13.8%

The State of Membership in Small Organizations

What is the state of small membership organizations in 2014 and how does their situation compare to last year? To answer this question, we've pulled together the responses to a number of our survey questions to offer up a snapshot of the small membership landscape.

Membership growth patterns

Close to 60% of our respondents noted that their organizations had experienced membership growth over the last year – although the majority saw increases of less than 19%. In addition, just over 20% managed to maintain their membership at existing levels.

When we look at membership growth over the last two years, our survey findings suggest that more organizations saw an increase in membership in 2014 versus 2013. However, at the same time, there was a marginal increase in those organizations that had a declining membership in 2014 as compared to 2013.

Change in Membership Growth	2014	2013
Membership levels remained the same	21.1%	41.8%
Membership increased	59.4%	43.3%
Membership decreased	14.8%	12.4%
Unsure	4.7%	2.5%

Retention rates

It would appear that membership was generally stable for most organizations during 2014, with **52% of respondents reporting that 80 to 90% of their members had renewed.**

It is also interesting to note that 16.4% of respondents indicated they were not sure about the levels of renewal at their organization. This response could indicate that the particular respondents are not involved with this aspect of their organization, or

Member engagement

Once again this year, finding ways to keep members engaged and participating was among the top 3 priorities for small membership organizations. So we asked respondents: *What tactics have you found helpful for increasing member involvement or engagement?*

It is interesting to note that, as with new member recruitment above, some of the key tactics that have been effective at improving member engagement involve personal and face-to-face contact and networking – such as events and phone calls.

The top 3 tactics for increasing member engagement were:

1. Events - including, for example:

- Seminars with working lunch for members
- Inviting members to host a Show & Share meeting
- Fun activities, outings, engaging speakers, opportunities for community volunteer service
- Requiring membership to attend conferences
- Social events

2. Personal contact - e.g., calls from board members

3. Email

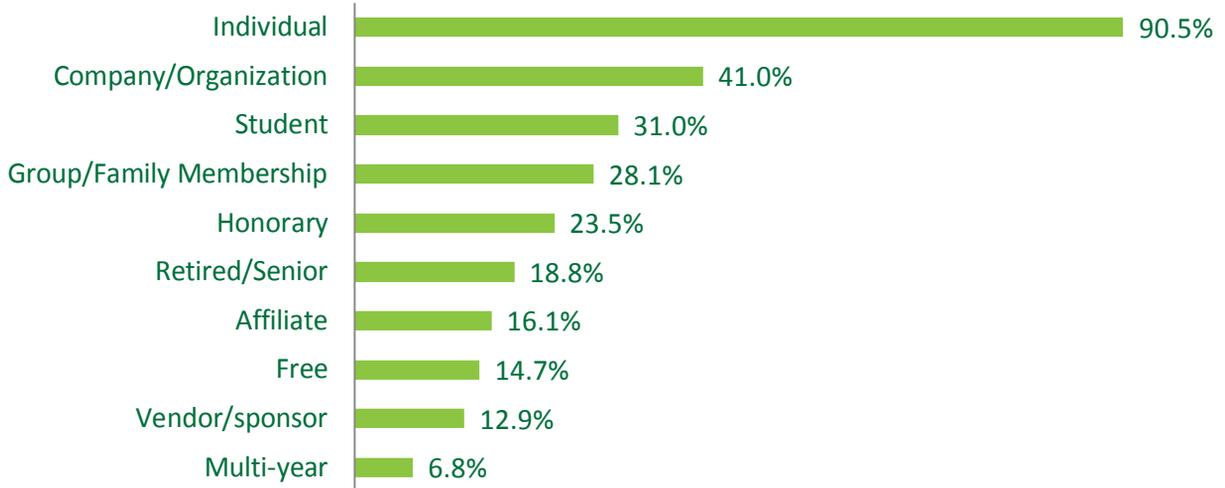
Membership categories

With so many small membership organizations looking for additional sources of revenue, it can be helpful to see what types of membership categories organizations are offering. For 2014, individual memberships (90.5%) and company/organization memberships (41.0%) are clearly still the most common. However, it was interesting to note some of the other membership categories, such as:

- retired/senior
- student
- free membership

In addition, one category that we omitted (but many respondents noted in “other”) was “life or lifetime” memberships.

Membership categories



Reasons members join

With organizations looking for help with member recruitment and engagement, we once again took a look at why members join.

For 2014, the top reasons members join were identified as:

- 1. Networking**
- 2. Professional development**
- 3. Learning best practices**
4. Events
5. Support the organization's mission
6. Information / news

It is interesting to note that we asked this as an open-ended question in the 2014 survey (rather than a multiple choice list), yet the top three reasons were exactly the same as in 2013.

We recognize that the reasons members join will vary depending on the type of organization. So with close to 40% of our respondents representing associations, it is understandable that four of the top six reasons members join involve opportunities to network and learn.

Communication Methods

Communicating with members is always critical for membership organizations of all sizes. It is also one of the key areas for which survey respondents have requested benchmarking information against which they can measure their own efforts and gather ideas for improvement.

The following survey findings offer insight into communication methods and channels for both existing members and prospects.

Key methods of communication with members



The top 5 most effective methods of communicating with existing members are:

- Email: 97.8%
- Online (website news, blog, forum, etc.): 76.2%
- Newsletter or magazine: 57.0%
- Facebook: 55.9%
- Networking meetings: 33.7%

These findings echo our 2013 report, with the top 5 categories remaining the same. It confirms that “email certainly isn’t dead” since it was also the number one channel identified in 2013 (97.3%) as well. While online/websites are once again the second most popular channel, there was a 13% increase over the last year. Newsletters / magazines saw less than a 2% decline in 2014, with Facebook increasing only marginally this year (1.4% over 2013).

Recruitment Channels

How are small membership organizations recruiting new members? For the 2014 survey, we asked this as an open-ended question to be sure we captured all of the possible methods.

Here are the top categories that were identified:

1. **Personal outreach and word-of-mouth**
(board, committee members, member-to-member)
2. Events (conferences, webinars, social events and educational programs)
3. Email
4. Website



It is interesting to note that this year, personal outreach and word of mouth were identified most often as the key recruitment channel, moving up from the second spot in 2013. As we noted above, even though online communications are essential in 2014, face-to-face, personal contact still plays a very important role in membership organizations. In addition, while websites were the number one choice last year, they have moved down to number four.

Financial Means & Outlook

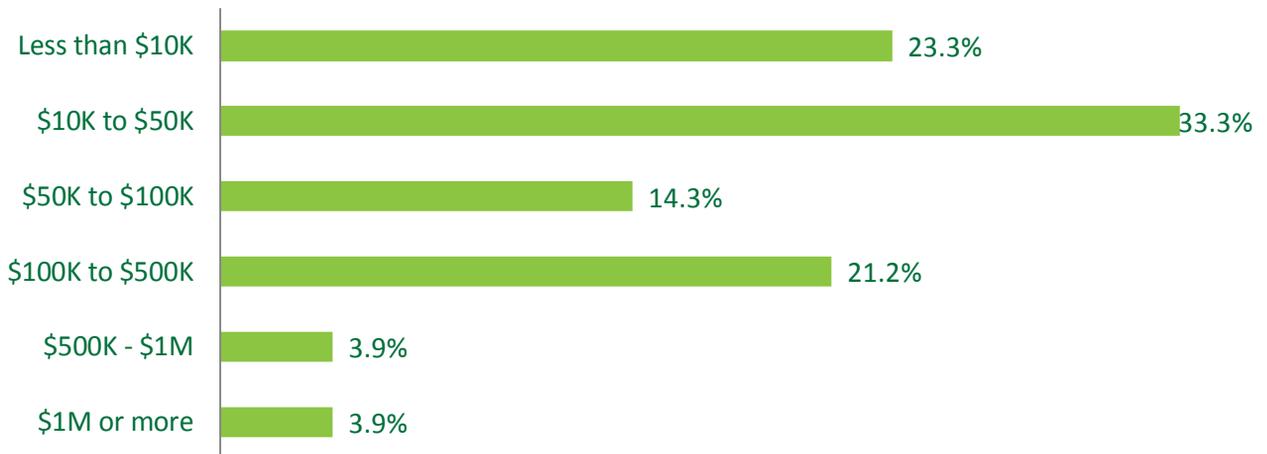
Last year, budgets, funding and administrative issues ranked second among the topics on which our small membership survey participants wanted information. So we've developed an overview of the current financial situation in terms of: budget size, sources of income, membership fees, additional sources of revenue, as well as incentives and discounts

Budget Size

Again this year, just over half (56.6%) of the organizations represented in our survey had budgets that were less than \$50,000. In total, 92.1% of respondents reported budgets of under \$500,000.

These percentages compare closely to the findings in the 2013 report, with the exception of the \$100,000 plus category, which grew from only 18.6% in 2013 to 29% in 2014.

Budget Size



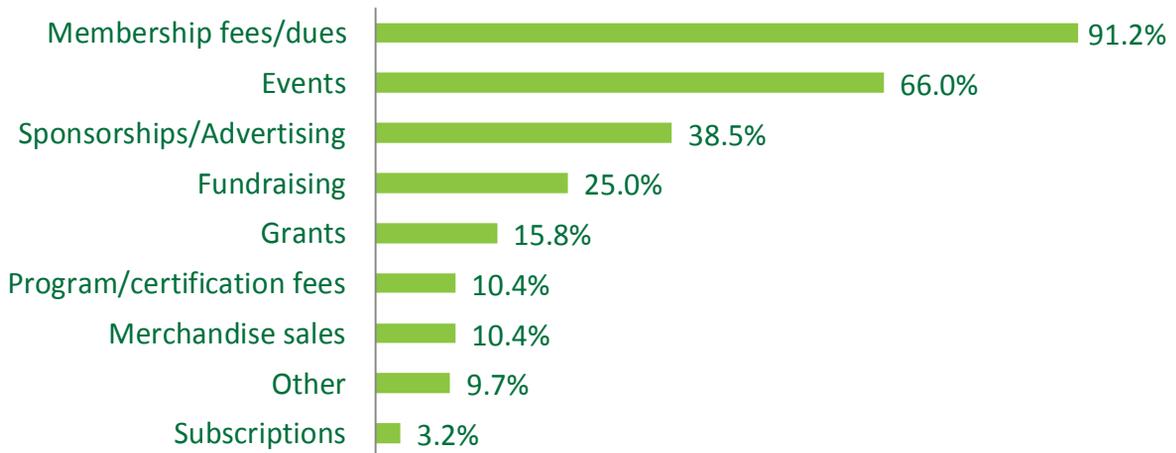
Sources of income

In terms of revenue for small membership organizations, we asked respondents to identify their "critical" sources of income. We also gathered information on membership fee ranges, effective sources of non-dues revenue, as well as details on any incentives or discounts organizations were offering to entice new or retain existing members.

Critical sources of revenue

It is not surprising to find that 91.2% of respondents identified membership fees or dues as a critical source of revenue for their small membership organization. In addition, as we found in last year’s survey, events were identified as the second most important source of revenue. This year, sponsorships/advertising were ranked as the third most important, followed by fundraising.

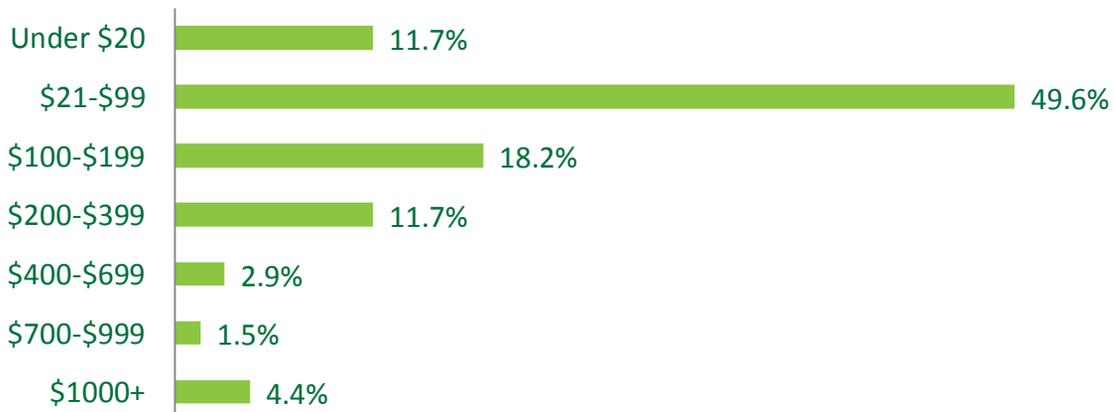
Sources of income



Membership fee range

With membership fees being the most important source of annual revenue, we looked at the various fee ranges. The most common membership fee range was \$21 to \$99 at 49.6%, followed by the \$100 to \$199 range at 18.2%.

Membership dues



Most effective source of non-dues revenue

In addition to asking respondents to identify and rank their critical sources of funding, this year's survey looked at sources of non-dues revenue. There was overwhelming agreement that events were the most important source of non-dues revenue. In fact one respondent noted that events represented 99% of their organization's overall revenue.

Top 5 sources of non-dues revenue:

1. Events
2. Sponsorship
3. Education (certification, training programs, teleseminars, mentoring programs, etc.)
4. Fundraising/Donations
5. Grants

In addition, there were some additional sources of non-dues revenue noted by survey participants, including:

- Merchandise sales
- Subscription fee to access password-protected side of website
- Insurance sales
- Retail outlet
- Project management fees
- Sales of member directory
- Fees for conducting research/studies
- Rental of office space

Incentives and discounts

Since small membership groups rely heavily on their member fees or dues, we wanted to see what fresh ideas or tactics organizations are taking to impact membership recruitment and retention using incentives or discounts.

Not surprisingly, the most effective incentives and discounts noted had to do with two of the top sources of non-dues revenue (see next page):

- 1. Discounted event fees** for members (e.g., conference, annual meeting, workshop fees) – *in fact a number of respondents noted that events were free for members.*
- 2. Reduced rates for member education** (e.g., training, certification programs) – *some also noted they offered members free certification as part of their membership benefits*

Additional incentives for members

While most of the respondents noted some form of discount for events and educational activities, there were some very interesting ideas for incentives designed to prompt members to join and/or renew. Here are a few of the ideas your small membership peers have implemented:

Member fees/rates

- Lifetime memberships
- Free 3-month trial membership
- Student rates and "bridge rates" for members who are between employment
- Seniors get half-off; same with spouses
- Junior memberships reduced from \$350/year to \$150/year
- Discount for family membership
- Multi-year membership
- Early Registration discount: renew early / promptly using last year's rates
- 20% off full yearly payment; 10% off 2 yearly payments; 5% off quarterly payments
- Volunteers get a discount on dues
- Lower affiliate rates when joining as a new member

Additional member incentive and discount ideas

- Discounts when advertising in multiple places, exposure in magazine
- Free advertising on the website
- VIP entrance into events
- Discounted sponsorship opportunities
- Members only merchandise discounts
- Discounted insurance

What Do Association Members Want to Ask Their Peers?

Since part of the reason we began conducting this survey was to capture and share insight on and from small membership representatives, this simple, open-ended question may be the most telling:

What is the one thing that we haven't asked that you'd like to find out from your peers at other small membership organizations?

Here is an overview of the top topics for small membership peers as identified by our survey participants.

Top 10 Topics

Our respondents had a lot of questions to ask of their peers! We received 170 responses to this question (about 35% of total respondents). After reviewing all of the responses, we sorted these into general categories, then identified the top 10 topics and challenges for small membership organizations that generated the most questions or comments. Here are the top 10, along with examples of some of their verbatim responses:

1. Boards

- *What is the best way to recruit and retain effective board members?*
- *Are board term limits effective?*
- *We all have jobs that pay the bills and volunteer our time to run the organization. All board members know this yet some do seemingly little. How do you get a board member to step it up so others do not have to always do heavy lifting?*
- *How to best use the skills of the board, and motivate them between monthly meetings?*
- *How do you convince a board of directors that you need more staff when there is money to pay for that?*

2. Member Retention

- *What are the most effective membership recruitment and retention strategies for national professional associations?*
- *Most effective retention strategies?*

- *Does it take a full time member manager in order to ensure member retention?*
- *How can I effectively use the member directory to fuel member retention?*
- *Member retention - when to drop if they haven't paid?*
- *Biggest overall obstacle to retention of membership?*

3. Social Media / Communications

- *How do they manage social media?*
- *How can a small organization (made up primarily of volunteers) get started using social media. We are still using a listserv and wonder if we would be better served using Facebook or a blog.*
- *How often they contact members via email, newsletters, social media?*
- *How do you engage and encourage communication among members?*
- *How to keep forum comments active and useful?*
- *How social media has helped or hurt their organization?*

4. Member Value

- *Adding value to member services and widening scope of activity?*
- *How to demonstrate membership value?*
- *How do you determine the ROI (what members pay versus the value they receive)?*
- *How do you get good feedback from your members to make sure you continue to bring them value and stay relevant?*
- *What third party programs do you find increase your efficiency and/or add value?*

5. Member Engagement

- *How are they handling social media to boost member engagement?*
- *How to engage members who pay dues but never attend meetings and events?*
- *How to keep volunteers engaged and enthusiastic? We have no trouble getting people to get involved, but participation wanes quickly.*
- *Engagement and participation strategies specifically in a volunteer organization, given everyone has an expectation since they have paid for membership?*
- *What feature(s) of your website draws the most interest from your members?*

6. Member Recruitment

- *What is the best way to reach prospective younger members?*
- *How to engage board to help recruit members?*
- *Strategies for getting contact lists for non-members who might benefit from joining?*
- *How to attract new members?*
- *How to entice more of our peers to join?*

7. Technology / Website

- *How to get members to accept doing things with new technologies? It's a double whammy - people don't like to do things differently and they're afraid of technology.*
- *How do you reach donors who are in the 50-60 year old range and are not tech savvy?*
- *How they educate the over 50 population in using technology?*
- *How to provide a better website experience for members (e.g. member forums, blogs, videos and PowerPoint presentations)?*
- *What and how are other organizations using technology in managing their association. All-in-one (like Wild Apricot) or several function-specific (unconnected) apps, or combination?*

8. Financial / Sponsors

- *How do I get supplemental income besides membership fees without offending the members?*
- *Funding sources for meetings?*
- *In a Community Association - how are potential revenue streams established (with value) for the members - from local retail and professional vendors?*
- *How do they source and engage sponsors?*
- *What can small nonprofits do to manage/minimize the extremely high cost of doing business?*
- *A list of "best practices" for adding sponsors?*
- *How do you get grants that actually allow for a payroll - as we are ALL volunteers at our organization?*

9. Volunteers

- *Methods for maintaining consistency and continuity with boards and volunteers changing over to new people?*
- *What are your succession strategies for key volunteers?*
- *What are your "best practices" for adding volunteers?*
- *How do you find new volunteers and retain them?*

10. Leadership

- *As the director, I am WAY under paid. I'd like to know if this is true for others.*
- *When should we consider hiring an executive director?*
- *Have you or are you planning to make a transition from fully volunteer to paid staff?*
- *Methods for maintaining consistency and continuity with boards and volunteers changing over to new people?*
- *Succession strategies for key staff?*
- *What organizational "best practices" are most important to your organization?*

Conclusion

After reviewing all of the responses from the 487 survey participants, the current state of small membership organizations in 2014 looks something like this:

- A typical small membership organization: has fewer than 500 members, is managed by a combination of volunteers and staff (1-2 full or part-time staff), and operates with a budget of under \$500,000.
- Despite being “resource-challenged” and mainly volunteer-led, 52.75% of small membership organizations indicate that they are “doing okay” in terms of meeting their missions at their current size.
- Increasing membership and engagement continue to be the key priorities, close to 60% of our respondents noted that their organizations had experienced membership growth and reported 80-90% renewal rates.
- In terms of financial stability, just over half (56.6%) of the organizations represented in our survey had budgets less than \$50,000; however, the

number of organizations in the \$100,000 plus category grew to 29% in 2014 (from only 18.6% in 2013).

- Many organizations have found inventive sources of non-dues revenue to offset their traditional membership fees or dues, including: hosting more events, developing new educational opportunities, finding sponsors, providing research, selling their membership directory and even renting out their office space.
- Although many organizations are struggling to entice younger members (AKA Millennials) to join or get involved, others are looking for ways to help their boards and membership to embrace digital technologies.
- A number of organizations are finding solutions to the generational challenges, by creating new membership categories such as: student, retired/senior, lifetime and even free memberships.

To answer our fundamental questions – *Does size matter?* and *Can small membership organizations be successful even at their small size?* – budget size *does* limit the resources available to small associations, clubs and non-profits, often meaning that they are managed by a group of dedicated volunteers or a skeleton staff. But they must be meeting their missions since they appear to be thriving and even growing.

As noted earlier, what seems to be essential for small membership organizations is to have a means of gathering ideas, benchmarking information and sharing information on topics, such as leadership, membership and financial models and general best practices with one another. (If that rings true to you and you'd like to share with your peers, consider joining Wild Apricot's [Small Membership Advisory Community](#).)

We hope this Small Membership Survey Report is a starting point in offering insight about and for small membership organizations.

About Wild Apricot

Wild Apricot's *all-in-one* integrated software was identified as #1 in *Capterra's Top Membership Management Software*, two years in a row. Wild Apricot offers cloud software to help small associations, non-profits and clubs build websites, connect with supporters, grow and manage their membership, and more.

Please include a link to <http://www.wildapricot.com/membership-insight-survey> if you copy, distribute or re-transmit any of the documents that make up this guide. For permissions beyond the scope of this license, please contact us.

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