

ATTRACTING YOUNG MEMBERS TO ASSOCIATIONS

An Insight Report from Art of Mentoring



HOW CAN ASSOCIATIONS ATTRACT YOUNG MEMBERS?

In the book “Participation,” published almost a decade ago by the William E. Smith Institute for Association Research, it was stated that members of generations X and Y just weren’t “joiners.”

Evidence suggests that this has been the case in the intervening time; attracting the young has been a huge challenge for associations in most sectors.

Are younger people just not as interested in affiliating with organizations anymore? Does the ability to conduct their lives effectively online mean that people no longer need the physical support and networking opportunities that large organizations and associations bring? Or are associations simply not engaging young members effectively enough?

In 2013, **Sage surveyed more than 11,000 small and medium sized businesses** in 17 countries across the world, to find out their attitudes towards business mentoring. Over 90% recognized that mentoring can help them succeed, but only 28% were currently making use of mentoring.

We were keen to find out more about attitudes towards mentoring among associations and professional organizations. Could mentoring programs help engage young members more effectively?

With this in mind, we surveyed almost 4,000 business leaders, consultants, and executives in professional associations in the US, Canada, Australia, and India, asking the following three questions:



1. Many Associations are finding it increasingly difficult to attract younger members. Do you agree this is a growing problem in the industry?

2. Career development and mentoring are the top values young professionals seek from their workplace, but most believe their employer doesn't do enough. Therefore, do you think that mentoring should be a key focus of Associations to attract younger members?

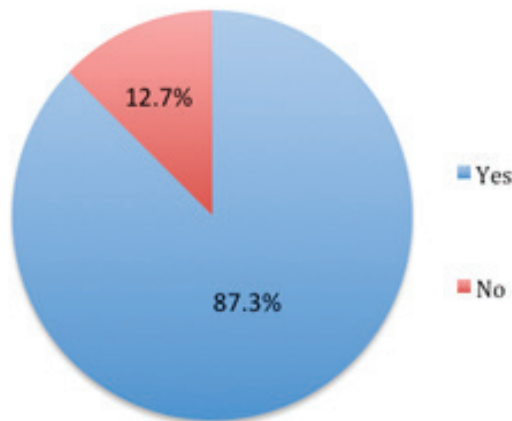
3. What are the challenges of implementing a large scale mentoring program?



Key Survey Insights

Question 1

Is it difficult to attract younger members?



An overwhelming majority of associations agree that it is difficult to attract members – and it's getting harder

87.3% of respondents agreed that attracting younger members to their associations and organizations is a growing problem; and many put forward possible reasons for this trend.

Some point towards outdated membership systems not engaging younger members:

“I do think it has become increasingly difficult to attract younger members; though I think this is a larger issue in the fact that many associations are stuck in an outdated membership system which does not appeal to the target market”.

Associate Director, Special Events & Fundraising (US)

Other respondents consider that employers are not doing enough to include and support their people:

“Yes, this is definitely a problem in the industry. A lot has to do with employers not

allowing their younger staff to participate... There are only a few companies that are very supportive of associations programs geared towards the younger members”.

Head of Department, Human Resources (India)

Many respondents suggest that the problem of attracting younger members is getting worse. Some possible reasons for the gap widening could be:

1. Younger members demand more value for becoming a part of an association.
2. Associations are not as relevant in a younger person's professional sphere - awareness of industry associations and the benefits derived from membership are blurred.
3. Older demographic of members can deter younger members - what value can an outdated system offer a younger member seeking attractive features and value for money?



Associations are NOT becoming irrelevant – but they must adapt to remain relevant for young people

Despite the difficulties in convincing younger people to make a commitment to a professional organization, there is a broad agreement that associations remain relevant for young professionals – they simply need to change their approach.



This view is backed up by numerous studies that suggest that Millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 1995) are at least as committed to their work as other generations; however, they differ in their demand for flexibility and their impatience for success.

“I believe that associations are having challenges remaining relevant to the needs and demands of younger people. Most younger people want to get involved with organizations in a very different way, however most organizations do not understand the value or see the relevance of how they operate.”

Acting Director, Institutional Development
(Canada)

“We attract young people as long as our content is relevant. Our challenge is keeping them engaged.”

Executive Director (US)

“Associations need to realign the benefits of membership to be relevant to younger members.”

Human Resources
and Organizational
Development (US)

There was also awareness among respondents that the problem of connecting with new generations is an age-old one currently being played out on a new organizational landscape:

“I don’t think this is a new problem. I think it is a problem any group has as it ages.... the leaders (older members that are now running the organization) suffer from lack of momentum, changing to keep up with the time. To keep attracting new members, organizations need to ensure that young people have a voice (not a squeak).”

Executive Director (US)

This generational gap was highlighted as a key challenge for organizations that need to adapt to new demands and expectations of the new generations:

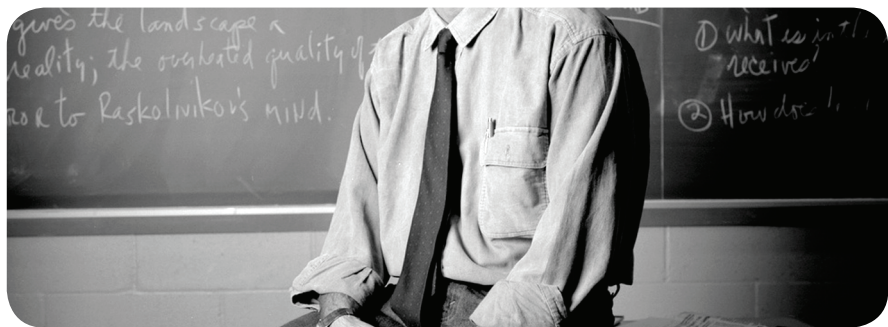
“Attracting younger members is a challenge but I think it is because associations are run in an outmoded fashion that does not attract young people.”

Executive Director (Canada)

“I do not see it as difficult to attract younger members as long as we have something to offer them. Younger people are more socially conscious and environmentally aware than previous generations...Aligning our groups to facilitate a bit to those philosophies would attract more young people.”

Assistant Professor of Business and Management
(US)

Other respondents remarked that the difference in technology usage is one of the key factors in widening the generation gap:



“...the younger crowd share information and meet in a much different way to the older generations.”

Youth Empowerment (US)

“It’s important to remember that young professionals may be more reliant on organic networking that they can partially direct through social media outlets...and social media didn’t really exist when most associations were created.”

Strategic Leader, Creative Problem Solver
(Canada)

Apart from technology, other barriers to entry for young people are considered to be:

Financial barriers - “there is a wealth of free information on the internet, and so there is little incentive to pay a fee to renew.”



A lack of understanding of the benefits that associations provide, compared with the alternative online and social media networks.

Many respondents volunteered ideas for creating positive change and staying relevant to young professionals - including the idea of mentoring programs:

“We are working on strategies to attract, engage and retain younger community members... It is a strategy that is both underway and in development simultaneously as we try new things.”

Senior Manager (Canada)

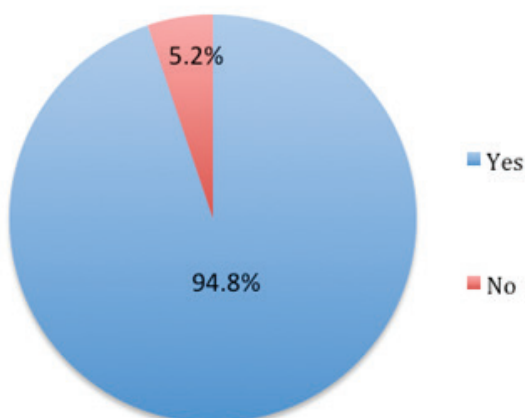
“One solution is to create projects that mentees want to become involved in with mentors and sponsor competitions requiring mentored teams to solve problems”.

Practice Management Consultant (US)

This subject of mentoring is the focus of the other two questions in our survey...

Question 2

Should Mentoring be a key focus of Associations to attract younger members?



Associations must make mentoring one of their key focuses to attract young people

A resounding 94.8% of respondents agreed that associations must adopt mentoring as a strategic change in order to attract young people.

“I absolutely believe focusing on mentoring would provide significant positive results to young people. Associations - as well as employers - can benefit from these relationships especially as they provide a pipeline for industry-specific workforce planning.”

Director of Career Services (US)



“Focused experience, education and relationship building under the guidance of seasoned professionals is valuable”.

Program Director (Canada)

Mentoring can help organizations remain relevant to younger people by helping their personal development and career path:

“Younger members are always looking for new ways to grow and develop. I think a strategic mentoring program could help not only attract younger members, but when in place could provide these younger members with a realistic career path.”

Human Resources Generalist (US)



“A more flexible approach to developing one’s career within an organization while providing for the acquisition of new skills and knowledge through horizontal and vertical movement - a “depth and breadth” approach can provide more interest to the help attract and maintain the younger demographic segments.”

Human Resources Director (Canada)

Some respondents outlined the successes that their own organizations have experienced from mentoring programs:

“Absolutely! Just a few years ago we built a mentor program with one of our national professional trade associations that was widely successful, and continues to grow. It has been instrumental in engaging both younger members and our more experienced members too, who enjoy their role as mentor and learn from the process as well.”

President (India)

“I agree totally with you that mentoring and learning opportunities are at the top of the list for younger members, and we do our best to provide those opportunities via Association staff and Board members.”

Principal (Canada)

Beyond this, mentoring programs are meeting a well-established and often-expressed need; programs are being actively requested by potential young employees and members:

“Every conference we host, we find our younger members are seeking mentoring opportunities from our seasoned leaders. There is definitely a hunger for mentoring and associations can fill the need.”

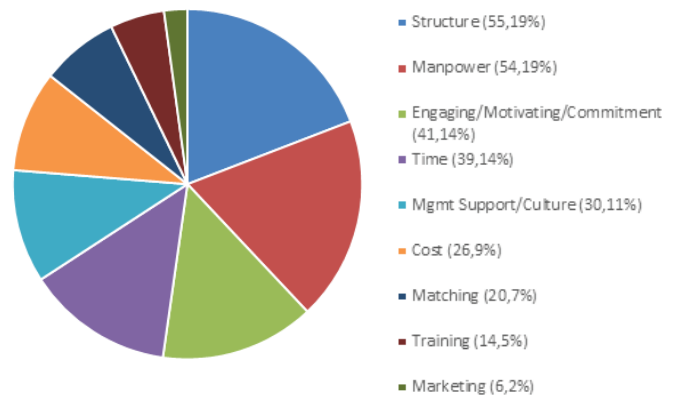
Chair Emerita and Past President (US)

“Millennials are always looking for companies that have training and development programs. This gains trust and respect towards the potential employer. It could also foreshadow the strength-based culture of the organization.”

Volunteer and Independent Contractor (US)

Question 3

Challenges of implementing a large scale MP



The biggest challenges to implementing and sustaining a Mentoring Program are structure, processes, manpower, and time

19% of respondents identified the biggest challenge to implementing a program as having the right structure to successfully sustain it; another 19% identified the manpower factor. Clearly, concern over resources is dominant.



“It requires a considerable amount of organization and management to maintain a high quality mentoring program...”

Deputy Superintendent (US)



“As for the biggest challenges in running a large scale mentoring program: Administration of the program, as these programs require a lot of follow-up and manpower and volunteer management has been our biggest challenge.”

Talent Management Solutions (Canada)



“Trying to determine the value proposition for both mentor and mentee, allocating staff to supporting a program, developing a program and recruiting volunteers and mentees are all sizeable pieces for us which we are trying to navigate.”

Senior Manager (Canada)

14% of respondents nominated time (another precious resource) as the main challenge to implementing a program. People are often simply too busy with their jobs:

“Anyone I know personally on a Board would mentor a younger person, if there was sufficient time taken to do so. Lack of time is a great barrier.”

Executive Director (Canada)

“Time and resource challenges are big. Mentors or those in the know seem to be spread very thin at work and in their personal lives.”

Organizational Development Director & Project Manager (US)

A possible solution?

It was well pointed out that mentoring programs need to be available online in order to be relevant for young professionals and to solve issues around distance and time – but such programs can make mentoring programs easier and more cost-effective for the organization too.

“Young professionals want “just in time” learning and are not willing to “wait”. Therefore, the need is to have an online process that allows for mentees to reach out to potential mentors. Young professionals are also NOT interested in paper processes - they won’t participate if it is not online.”

National Vice-President of Young Professionals Development & Mentoring (Canada)

“...the ability to adequately use technologies to communicate that might help overcome distance and time factors.”

Organizational Development Director (US)

Once a program is set up, many organizations struggle to find enough volunteers willing and capable of mentoring and to maintain commitment from mentees

14% of people responded that finding enough leaders with the quality and commitment to the mentoring program is the biggest challenge.



“The biggest challenge for wide scale mentoring programs is twofold with the challenges being identification of effective leadership and leadership that is willing and able to make the necessary time commitment. Another variable to consider would be the mentors specifically. Are there enough leaders who are qualified to be directing the career path of others?”

Sales & Marketing Leader & Development Manager (US)



“Managing consistency and quality of the programs and the mentors”.

Performance Communication Pro, Speaker, Author (US)

“Not enough Mentors. Huge voluntary commitment. Those that do commit to give themselves love it when they can keep it in balance.”

Team Leader (US)

Part of the problem here is the failure of many mentors to adequately see the benefits and to treat it as a priority:

“Mentors would have to understand and value the concept of mentoring, while the young members need to appreciate the effort being made by the mentors.”

Education/Franchising Management Executive (India)

“Since the association mentoring isn’t a job requirement, members seem to willingly

enter into the relationship with less concern for making it work (and seeing it through).”

Director of Organizational Development (US)

A possible solution?

The solution to this challenge partly lies in “onboarding” and setting expectations of the entire mentoring concept better to both mentors and mentees:

“Associations need to convey to their membership through an effective marketing strategy the true impact of a strong mentorship program in terms of overall engagement and succession planning. One key thing to remember is that both the mentor and the person receiving mentorship benefit from the relationship.”

Executive Director (Canada)

Better structuring, communication of the requirements and commitments, and follow up of the program will also lead to better results:

“Commitment is the biggest challenge... getting Mentors to commit to a specific time frame and keeping their word to continue....I suggest signing up mentors with an outline of the obligations upfront and have it included in a plan that the mentor/mentee follows.”

President & CEO (US)

Without the full support of leadership and adequate funding, a mentoring program will struggle to get the resources needed to be successful

Another major challenge of successfully implementing a mentoring program is getting backing, support, and buy-in from leadership. Without this, the program will struggle to get off the ground:

“One challenge is getting complete understanding and support from the upper management.”

Business Management Professional (Canada)



“The biggest challenge we have faced is the lack of support from our Board and the manpower needed to start the program.”

Director of Membership & Special Events (US)

9% of respondents identified a lack of budget for mentoring as the major obstacle:

“The administrative work to plan and deliver a robust mentoring program is significant. It is a challenge to get funding for something that doesn’t have a concrete ROI.”

Change Management Consultant and Coach (Australia)

“Organizations wish to do everything in ‘spare’ time and with strict budgets.”

Head Corporate Relations (India)

“Resources are being put into CPD but not “mentoring” at the members’ level. When the main revenue stream is still membership dues, money is the big issue as well as the resources to make it happen.”

Director (Canada)

The solution to leadership support?

Part of the solution is again to clearly outline the benefits to all parties concerned. When leadership becomes aware of the return on investment available from well-run mentoring programs, it will be more willing to release the funds necessary to implement more programs.



Importantly, if associations think creatively about resourcing programs they can break even and even make a small profit apart from the other benefits. Firstly they can ask mentees to pay something for their participation, which gives them a bit more “skin in the game” leading to better outcomes. Secondly they can source a ‘corporate supporter’ to partner them - a very positive type of sponsorship for corporations.



And of course there are other benefits, including improved retention and acquisition of members and better teamwork:

“The problems with corporate support from the top here run along budgetary and culture lines but the benefits from improved teams typically overrun the costs.”

Board and CEO Advisor for Small to Midsized Businesses (US)

Finding the perfect match between mentors and mentees requires specific skills and processes which many organizations don’t possess.

The actual process of matching mentors with mentees requires experience and know-how that most organizations do not have access to. This is a major challenge for setting up a successful program:



“Matching mentors and mentees and then making sure that they actually connect is always the problem when offering this type of program.”

Director of Industry Partnership and Training
(US)



“As an association we do not have the resources to mentor directly ourselves but would rely on organizations and members for support with this type of initiative.”

Organizational Effectiveness & Professional
Learning & Development Consultant (Canada)

“Developing matchup programs in organizations would help alleviate much of the stress of finding a mentor”.

Assistant Professor of Business & Management
(US)

One respondent referred to the “balance” that needs to be struck...which comes with experience:

“Capturing the right data to create the best mentor/mentee match can be challenging, yet it tends to improve each year. The program needs to strike a healthy balance between doing too much to nurture the mentor/mentee relationship, and doing too little.”

President (US)

A possible solution?

Solutions proposed for meeting the challenge of better matching mentors with mentees include hiring a full time administrator to look after the process of organizing and scheduling sessions, or bringing in specialist staff to look after guided programs and regular reviewing of progress.

Simply learning to listen better to the requirements of mentees and mentors was also suggested as a way to become more proactive in designing better programs.

Some of the better virtual mentoring programs also provide effective online tips and guidelines for improving program administrators’ abilities at matching the right mentee with the right mentor.

SUMMARY:

Mentoring programs can be a competitive advantage for associations of the future.

Many challenges face associations looking to attract young members. The urgency to address these is clear when we consider that, in a decade from now, 75% of the global workforce will be millennials, according to The Deloitte Millennial Survey (2014).



That survey also found that 50% of millennials believed their organizations could do more to develop future leaders.

As many aging committee members retire and baby boomers leave, a new focus on engaging young, ambitious and connected professionals can be met by implementing mentoring programs.

While successfully implementing mentoring programs is challenging in itself, there are many tools on hand to make life easier for organizations wanting to create a competitive edge and to differentiate themselves from others in the industry.



“Virtual mentoring” employs a flexible suite of communication tools, allowing mentoring via Skype, telephone, email and messaging, for instance. This solves many of the problems with time, resources, availability, and cost, outlined by survey respondents above.

Mentoring programs work for all parties. When Sun Microsystems compared the career progress of 1,000 employees over a five-year period, they found:

1. Employees who received mentoring were promoted FIVE times more often than people who didn't have mentors.

2. Mentors were SIX times more likely to have been promoted to a bigger job.

Word gets around. When mentoring programs are successful they attract new blood to the organization, create a sustainable culture of achievement, and reduce the worrying “brain drain” of talented employees drifting to other organizations that better engage them.

For Associations, finding and working with a well matched mentor adds hugely to the value of a young person's membership. This well networked demographic will then spread the word, making attraction and retention of millennials more effective.

About Art of Mentoring

Art of Mentoring mobilises the mentors in communities to grow members.

Our suite of products were developed to meet a need for technology-enabled mentoring resources for Associations and other organisations. For those seeking better value, expert content and a contemporary approach to learning and implementing mentoring.

To learn more about mentoring and how to make it work in your association, here is the eGuide:

<http://artofmentoring.net/short-eguide/>



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