

REALTOR® AE

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Make a Difference

35 association community outreach programs that build, beautify, and inspire Page 12



Select the Best Politicians to Back

Page 22

Pros and Cons of Establishing a Charity

Page 26

AE Profile, Norman Morris: Advocacy & Disaster Relief

Page 28

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REALTOR® AE

Fall 2016

feature

The Best of REALTOR® Association Community Outreach

35 inspiring ideas that may help you meet the Core Standards consumer outreach requirement.

[Page 12](#)

AE voices

AE COMMITTEE CHAIR UPDATE

Outreach Is in Our Heart

[Page 2](#)



PROFILE

Norman Morris

CEO of the Louisiana REALTORS® on advocacy and disaster relief.

[Page 28](#)



online

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On the Cover: Members of the Greater Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®, Mich., gathered to revitalize a playground and green space called REALTOR® Park, established in 1967.



Leadership of the Santa Clara County Association of REALTORS® (Neil Collins, AE; Trisha Motter, 2016 president; Rick Smith, president-elect) championed consumer outreach events in 2016 ranging from a charity fundraising golf tournament to a park cleanup; more is planned for 2017 to meet the Core Standards Consumer Outreach requirement.

news

HOT TOPICS

President Brown's 2017 Priorities

[Page 4](#)



PROGRAMS & BENEFITS

Gear up for the end-of-year ethics rush.

[Page 6](#)



need to know

ADVOCACY

The Best Politicians to Back

How to get your board and members on board with candidate selection.

[Page 22](#)

TECH

Boost Your Social Media Reach

How to use the metrics about your fans, follows, likes, mentions, and shares to build a better communications plan.

[Page 24](#)



LEGAL

Pros and Cons of Establishing a Charitable Organization

[Page 26](#)

Outreach Is in Our Heart



Marc Lebowitz, RCE, CAE, former CEO, Tucson Association of REALTORS®, 2016 chair of the AE Committee

"Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it. Remember, you don't live in the world all of your own." —Albert Schweitzer

It was late one spring night in 2014, way past dinner. The National Association of REALTORS® Organizational Alignment PAG, had been meeting all day, and snow was falling hard outside the NAR building in Washington, D.C.

We were stuck on how to best capture the essence of meaningful "consumer engagement" and communicate what Core Standards would need associations do to satisfy this outreach requirement. I believe was Cindy Butts, CEO of the Connecticut Association of REALTORS®, who said something like, "This is the easy one. This is what associations do every day regardless of their size or resources. This is who we are."

What Cindy was saying is what we all know: REALTOR® associations have had

making their communities better at their heart for more than a hundred years.

It was REALTORS® who lined up with Lady Bird Johnson in the 1960s to help in the Keep America Beautiful campaign. It was our REALTORS® Relief Foundation in 2005 that supported the construction of nearly 100 new homes for victims of Hurricane Katrina all along the Gulf Coast. It was through the efforts of our state associations that aid was mobilized and delivered to victims of tornadoes in Oklahoma and flooding in the southeast.

It was our 2016 NAR President Tom Salomone who said, "Let's do all of that and then some, and focus our support on the Boys & Girls Clubs of America."

This issue celebrates the greatness of outreach that is our organization: local, state, and national.

I have my own outreach story. Last year I met an inspiring woman, Chef Minnie, executive chef for the Gospel Rescue Mission in Tucson. As it turns out, Chef Minnie (aka Robin Hardy) was a REALTOR® for many years before following her passion for cooking and providing food support for nearly 100 of our city's most vulnerable women and children every day.

Through a connection on Facebook, I learned that her rescue mission had a need. Over a few weeks of planning and fundrais-



Marc Lebowitz (left, seated) with Tucson Association YPN members, and Gospel Rescue Mission's chef Robin Hardy (center in pink).

ing, the REALTOR® organization and the Tucson YPN group designed and installed four raised-bed herb gardens so Chef Minnie and her team could have a sustainable source of herbs and spices for their kitchen and a learning lab to help mission residents learn how to grow food for themselves.

What strikes me most is that this story isn't unique. REALTORS® teaming up to help their neighbors happens every day. It's who we are.

Life has a funny way of changing our course from time to time. As I write this final column as the 2016 AEC chair, I am no longer working with the Tucson Association of REALTORS®. I want to thank everyone in Tucson for their support. Together we accomplished some amazing things and had some great times.

Thank you for the honor of being your 2016 chair of the Association Executives Committee.



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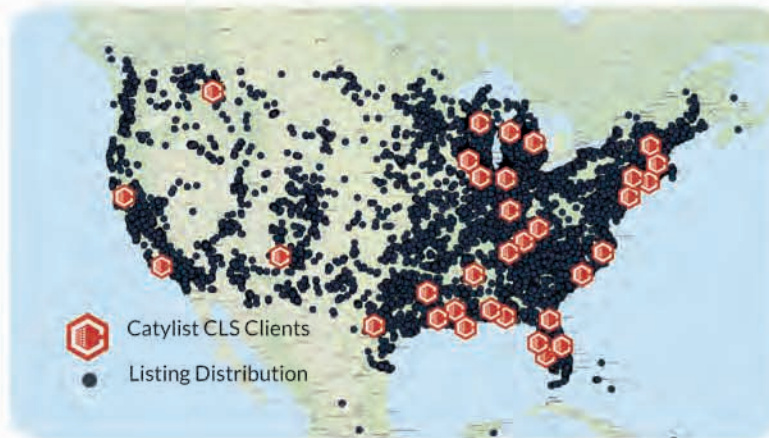
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President Brown's 2017 Priorities

Speaking at the August Leadership Summit, Bill Brown, the 2017 president of the National Association of REALTORS®, announced four key goals that will be the focus of the next year, and urged local and state associations to get onboard with these goals.

"National priorities and initiatives are successful only when they are supported by state and local associations," Brown told the association executives and 2017 local- and state-elected leaders at the summit. "We are all serving the same members."

Brown also noted the variety of existing and new resources NAR will offer at the state and local levels to support these priorities and initiatives.

The first of Brown's goals is to raise the homeownership rate, which has fallen in recent years to 63 percent. "If we can improve the homeownership rate . . . we can open the door to the American dream for more people [and] strengthen communities, and it will create more opportunities for our members," he said.

In a time when younger generations increasingly question why home ownership is better than renting, NAR will develop new ways to answer that question. NAR announced plans to team up with

researchers at the Fisher Center for Real Estate & Urban Economics at University of California Berkeley's Haas School of Business to discover whether additional academic research might aid legislators and policy makers to encourage home ownership.

Brown's second and third goals call for a doubling of efforts to preserve home owners' mortgage interest and property tax deductions, 1031 tax-deferred exchanges, and the government's support of the GSEs and FHA-insured loans.

"There's a good chance elimination of both residential and commercial provisions will be on the congressional agenda next year," Brown said.

Last, Brown said he will focus on REALTORS®' financial future.

"Too many of our members have a decent career, but when they want to retire they don't have the means to do so," he said. "I want to see all of our members become financially solvent and independent."

To this end, NAR will launch a new course, "Real Estate Investing: Build Wealth Representing Investors and Becoming One Yourself."

Look for more resources to support these goals in the coming months.



Plan to Attend 2017 AE Institute in Denver

Registration for the 2017 AE Institute opens at noon CST Wednesday, Dec. 7. AEI, which runs from March 17 to 20, 2017, offers sessions on the fundamentals of REALTOR® association management, REALTOR® Party updates, enhanced and in-depth MLS programming, and Core Standards implementation, along with three focused tracks: customer service, peer-to-peer game changers, and technology and communications. Back by popular demand, AEI will feature a special one-day CEO track on March 17 that is limited to 125 attendees. Tuition costs \$545 if registered before Jan. 31 or \$575 thereafter. Register at realtor.org/aei.

Join the Conversation at the AE Facebook Group



Now with more than 400 members, the official Facebook group for REALTOR® asso-

ciation executives, run and moderated by your fellow AEs, is a forum to post questions, share advice, tout successes, and discuss issues. The closed group, called AEI Year-Round, is open to chief staff executives and staff

specialists. Your posts on this group page are shared only with your fellow AE group members. No posts are visible to Facebook users who are not AEI Year-Round group members. To join, search for "AEI Year-Round" on Facebook and click the "join" button.

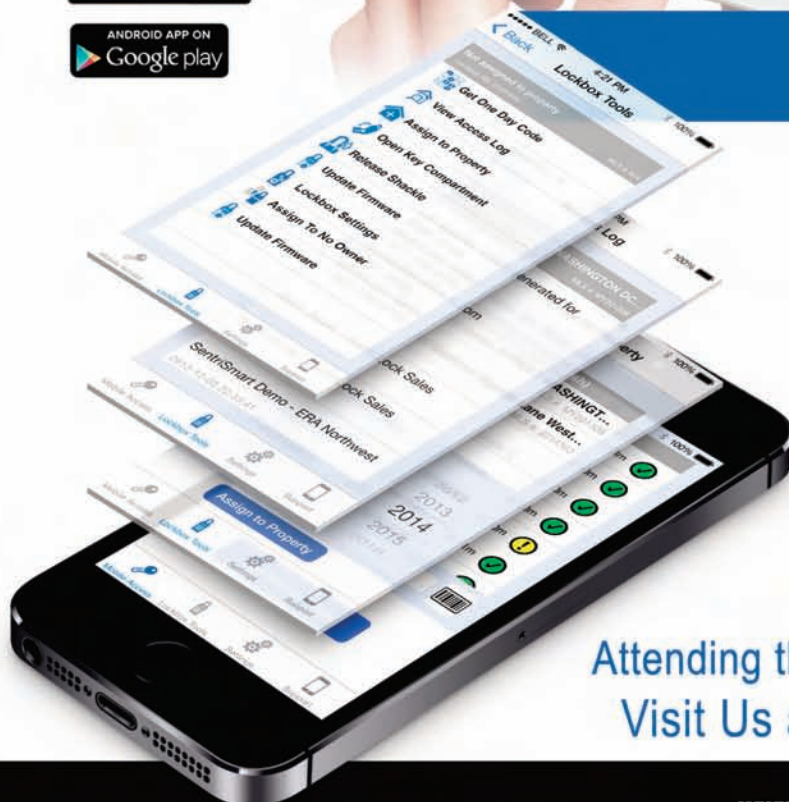


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Gear Up for the End-of-Year Ethics Rush

The National Association of REALTORS® ethics requirement gives members until Dec. 31, 2016, to take an approved ethics course. And given the average real estate practitioner's penchant for operating on a just-in-time basis, associations are scheduling eleventh-hour ethics courses for members in December. Yet associations have reported high early compliance rates during this ethics cycle. As of September, 98 percent of members at the Central Hill Country Board of REALTORS®, Texas, have completed training, according to Lisia Amburn, AE. At the REALTORS® of South Central Kansas, nearly 80 percent of members had taken their

quadrennial ethics course as of September, says Cindi Ferguson, e-PRO, the association's director of professional development.

Training must be no less than two-and-a-half hours of instructional time every four years, and members can take the course in a number of ways. NAR's online ethics course remains a popular option. The new interactive online REALTOR® Code of Ethics training course (\$29.95) offers an estimated three credit hours of continuing education in many states, and is available on the Center for REALTOR® Development at onlinelearning.realtor. The free online course option is available at realtor.org.

Victory Over Patent Claim for Property Search Feature

The National Association of REALTORS® negotiated a settlement on behalf of the real estate industry to end patent enforcement actions against real estate businesses that send email alerts when a website is updated with a property that matches a user's criteria.

Data Distribution Technologies claimed to own the patent on this widely used technological process and threatened to sue several real estate businesses unless they paid a licensing fee. NAR filed a lawsuit in June seeking to invalidate the company's patent.

NAR's legal action resulted in a settlement

whereby NAR will drop its challenge to the patent if Data Distribution Technologies agrees to no longer enforce its patent in the real estate industry. NAR members, associations, MLSs, affiliates, and other related entities are now protected from potentially costly legal action.

NAR President Tom Salomone hailed the announcement. "When REALTORS® fall victim to abuses in the patent system, NAR is going to have their back," he said. "We're hopeful that the settlement will remind patent trolls across the country that this type of exploitation is unacceptable and won't go unanswered."

Lawsuit Over Photo Copyright in MLS Dismissed

When Alexander Stross, a REALTOR® and architectural photographer in Texas, found his sold-listing photos on a website operated by real estate brokerage Redfin, he sued the brokerage for copyright infringement. Yet in September, a Texas federal court directed Stross to raise his concerns with his MLS rather than in federal court. The court held

that Stross lacked standing to sue to enforce the MLS rules. Although the court did not rule on Redfin's defense that it was protected from copyright infringement claims under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, it did acknowledge

that Redfin's argument was "persuasive." Read more about this case at realtor.org.



New NAR Benefit: TurboTax, QuickBooks Self-Employed

Organize your finances and make tax preparation easy with member savings on Intuit's signature products: QuickBooks Self-Employed, a streamlined app for income and expense management, and TurboTax, America's best-selling online tax software. These offerings are well-suited to meet the unique needs of real estate professionals.

Discounts available through NAR's REALTOR Benefits® Program include 50 percent off per month on QuickBooks Self-Employed for your first 12 months and ongoing benefits thereafter, \$10 off TurboTax Deluxe, \$15 off TurboTax Premier, and \$20 off TurboTax Home & Business. Get the QuickBooks Self-Employed and TurboTax bundle for 29 percent off per month for your first 12 months. These two Intuit products' integrate seamlessly for easy quarterly and year-end tax filing. This offer is available to NAR members and association staff and their immediate family members. See site for terms and conditions. Learn more at realtor.org/Intuit.



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Southwest Florida Summit Focuses on Road Issues

Traffic headaches, crash statistics, and possible solutions to it all were the focus of a transportation summit in Cape Coral, Fla., Sept. 30, sponsored by the Royal Palm Coast REALTOR® Association and the Streets Alive of SWFL. The event drew about 200 attendees, including county and municipal leaders, engineers, planners, REALTORS®, and members of the public, to hear experts on transportation talk about how planning can go a long way toward alleviating congestion and lowering the number of traffic accidents. Other topics included designing streets for pedestrian and cyclists, narrowing street lanes to discourage speeding and make more room for walkers, and building traffic circles.



Small Association Sponsors Growth Study

The 58-member East Central South Dakota REALTORS® used a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant from the REALTOR® Party to bring in a planning expert to help the city of Brookings govern its own growth with a wise eye to the future.

The city's mayor had recently established an affordable housing task force and a Comprehensive Master Plan Advisory Committee, both of which had REALTORS® on board. "Naturally, REALTORS® are deeply invested in this because it directly affects their livelihood. But they are also, by definition, people who are involved and invested in their communities and want to see them thrive and prosper," says RaeAnn Thompson, the association's executive.

"Everyone was more than receptive to the idea, and agreed that the timing was perfect. The housing situation really is a top priority here," she says.

When Tharp returned in August, she presented a report that shed light on issues and challenges that Brookings is facing and offered examples of possible solutions she'd seen succeed elsewhere. "She pointed out the need for what she called 'missing middle homes,'" notes Thompson, referring to more compact housing arrangements that are in short supply in Brookings, such as townhomes, cottages and courtyard homes. The suggestion of an architectural design contest was well received, she added, and developers are investigating the concept of



The East Central South Dakota REALTORS®' smart growth study revealed that more compact housing developments, rather than more single-family homes (pictured above in this photo of Brookings), might help alleviate the city's tight housing supply.

Photo: Google Earth

The association used its Smart Growth Action Grant, which it matched by 10 percent, to commission a study from Janet Tharp, a Dallas-based urban and regional planner, who traveled twice to Brookings for the project. Her first trip, in June, was an information-gathering mission, during which she toured the city by car and met with numerous city stakeholders; city and county elected and appointed officials; representatives from the university, the school board, the local utility companies, and affordable housing interest groups; and builders, developers, and business advocates. Thompson was able to arrange these encounters easily.

"tiny homes." The report also emphasized the need to capitalize on the city's distinctive downtown district and create more mixed-use development there to attract millennials who value walkability.

From conversations with members who serve on the city's advisory committee and the Affordable Housing Task Force, Thompson knows that the study is a great asset to Brookings at a critical point in its evolution. At the meeting where the report was presented, the mayor recognized the vision and support of the REALTORS®.

For more on Smart Growth Action Grants, visit realtoractioncenter.com.



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HOME Survey Shows Affordability Concerns

Lofty home-price growth and tight supply are leading to softening confidence among renters about whether it's a good time to buy a home, according to the latest installment of the National Association of REALTORS® Housing Opportunities and Market Experience survey. The consumer survey found that a misconception about how much of a down payment is needed to buy could be unnecessarily delaying some qualified young adults from entering the market. NAR's third-quarter HOME survey asked consumers about their confidence in the

U.S. economy and various questions about their housing expectations, including several related to down payments and the amount of money they believe they need to purchase a home. Results show that the share of home owners and renters who believe now is a good time to buy remains at a solid majority but has crept downward since the beginning of this year. Seventy-eight percent of home owners (80 percent in June; 82 percent in March) and 60 percent of renters (62 percent in the previous two quarters) said it's a good time to buy.



Congratulations, New REALTOR® AE CAEs

Three REALTOR® association staff professionals recently earned the Certified Association Executive designation from the American Society of Association Executives: **Wyndi Austin**, RCE, CAE, director of marketing communications at the Southeast Valley Regional Association of REALTORS®, Arizona; **Mike Barth**, CAE, director of association services at the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS®; and **Thomas Larson**, CAE, vice president of legal and public affairs at the Wisconsin REALTORS® Association.



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THE BEST OF REALTOR® ASSOCIATION

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

CORE STANDARDS

Activities like these may help your association fulfill the Core Standards consumer outreach requirement.

From planting community gardens to hosting home ownership seminars, REALTORS® and their associations contribute countless hours of community service every year. They raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for local and national charities. They also raise awareness for issues ranging from walkable communities to workforce housing. They grow, beautify, and enrich their communities in many ways. On the following pages we feature just a sampling of the REALTOR® association-led community and consumer outreach efforts shaping communities nationwide.



Members of the REALTOR® Association of Sarasota and Manatee volunteered at the Tiny Hands Foundation to fill more than 1,600 backpacks with school supplies for community children in need.

Building & Beautification

Helping communities become more livable, sustainable, and desirable.

Build homes. Working closely with the Bend Area Habitat for Humanity, the **Central Oregon Association of REALTORS®** helped raise \$75,000 (\$40,000 from members) this summer for a project called "The House that Real Estate Built." REALTORS® also volunteered to help build the house, on which construction will begin later this year. To help facilitate raising money and coordinating volunteers, Habitat for Humanity created a custom webpage for the

association, which took the burden of tracking financial contributions and organizing volunteers of the 1,700-member association.

▼ **Promote walkability.** The **Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS®, S.C.**, partnered with the city of Myrtle Beach on a two-day walkability study of the community and a workshop with nationally recognized consultants, REALTORS®, city planners, engineers, the mayor, and city administrators. The goal was to improve walkability and biking in the city's main corridors. As a result of the event, the city is enacting plans to make the community a more desirable place to live.





▲ Plant Community Gardens.

Helping conserve open space and transform a local rural property into a natural community gathering space, the **Plymouth and South Shore Association of REALTORS®**, Pa., funded and planted an organic community garden. A \$2,500 Placemaking Micro-Grant from the REALTOR® Party supported the construction of multiple raised garden beds, which were built over two days by volunteers including about 20 REALTORS®. The garden features a dedicated “demonstration” bed for teaching gardening skills. The remaining beds are available for public gardening, and the community is encouraged to donate excess produce to area food pantries. The garden is one component of a larger site that also features benches, picnic tables, and a tree swing to welcome visitors to the scenic open fields and nearby complex of walking trails.

GRANT FUNDED

This association received a REALTOR® Party Placemaking Grant.



▲ Help needy home

owners. Rebuild Day is an annual event at the **St. Louis Association of REALTORS®** in conjunction with Rebuilding Together St. Louis, a community revitalization organization. This year more than 100 member volunteers tackled day-long rehab and beautification tasks for the community's needy and elderly home owners. The association also presented the organization with a check for \$20,000. “Volunteering to help Rebuilding Together St. Louis mend these homes is a true labor of love for our organization,” says John Gormley, association CEO.

Support Habitat for Humanity. The **Greater**

Chattanooga Association of REALTORS®, Tenn., raised more than \$73,000 in 2016 for Habitat for Humanity through its well-attended charity golf tournament and wine tasting event. Tickets sold for \$49 to \$69 and the golf tournament entry fee was \$150 per person (\$600 per team). Additional tickets were sold onsite for whiskey tasting and ball-toss events. The association alternates every year between hosting a Habitat for Humanity fundraising event and a home-building event where members help with construction.



▲ Rehab picnic areas.

YPNers at the **Northeast Association of REALTORS®**, Ma., teamed up with a local National Historical Park and youth group to refurbish a meeting and picnic area this year. The project was funded by the association and a REALTOR® Party Placemaking Grant.



▲ Build family homes.

In September, when the Habitat for Humanity in Eugene, Ore., sent out a call for volunteers, the **Eugene Association of REALTORS®** Young Professionals Network responded. Nearly a dozen members helped with construction and painting at a home that is expected to be occupied by a needy family in time for the holiday season.



◀ **Turn out to revitalize.** Fourteen homes in an urban Kansas City neighborhood were revitalized by 300 REALTORS® during Rock the Block, an event sponsored by the **Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS®** and Habitat for Humanity to improve quality of life and home values.

Charity & Fundraising

Caring for the disadvantaged, homeless, and hungry.

A. Collect food donations

The Northeast Association of REALTORS® in Westford, Mass., holds a food drive every year to benefit a local food bank. Members work with local grocery stores and the food bank to coordinate a day to staff donation tables outside the stores. This year, the association collected 3,306 pounds of food and \$575 in donations to purchase additional food.

B. Support law enforcement

To encourage its community to show support for local fallen police officers, the Coeur d'Alene Association of REALTORS® in Idaho participated in its local "Paint the Town Blue" event by asking members to install blue lightbulbs in their porch light fixtures. The association ordered blue lightbulbs for each of its 1,100 members and sold additional bulbs to members to give to clients and friends for \$2. Each bulb box explained the goal of the event and provided a spot for the agent's business card. Members purchased more than 6,000 bulbs. Proceeds went to the Kootenai County Police & Fire Memorial Foundation, which helps families of fallen or health-stricken police and firefighters.

C. Help the homeless

Fundraising in public places brings attention not only to the charity but also to the volunteers asking for donations. At the REALTORS® Association of Lincoln, Neb., dozens of members pinned large REALTOR® badges to their charity-branded T-shirts and hit the street corners to raise money for Matt Talbot Kitchen & Outreach, benefiting the area's homeless. "We know REALTORS® do more than sell houses. They care about this community, and we know individuals in the community who are homeless or nearly homeless are just as important as home owners," says Diana Schilf, chair of the association's community relations committee. This year's event in October coincided with the Nebraska vs. Wisconsin college football game. Volunteers wore black "Huskers Helping the Homeless" T-shirts and stood outside of Sam's Club, Walmart, and other stores.



▲ Nationwide Salvation Army ring day for real estate professionals is Dec. 2, 2016.



▲ **Encourage Giving.** The fifth annual sock drive sponsored by the REALTORS® Association of Lincoln, Neb., collected more than 8,000 pairs to be distributed to the poor, homeless, and near-homeless population using the services of the People's City Mission and Homeless Prevention Center. Dropoff sites this year were at members' offices and throughout the city.

Online Promotion

The REALTORS® Association of Lincoln hosts a standalone website at LincolnRealtorsCare.com to communicate all its community outreach efforts.



Rally members to give. Communication is essential to the success of any charity program. Regularly inform members and encourage them to participate. Invite the local media and send them post-event coverage and photos. Post photos of members on social media and thank them for their service.

◀ At the **San Antonio Board of REALTORS®**, Texas, the communications department creates fliers, social media graphics, and

emails to promote each year's charity and fundraising events. This year, information was posted on the association website and in the online and print newsletter about several events, including a holiday toy drive, breakfast with Santa, a school uniform drive, and a karaoke fundraiser, benefiting SAM Ministries, a local interfaith organization offering shelter and services to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.

POPULAR EVENT

San Antonio's most popular event is its charity Christmas event for disadvantaged kids.

Housing Opportunity

Introducing renters and families to their homeownership possibilities.



▲ **Promote affordable housing.** The **REALTOR® Association of Pioneer Valley**, Mass., worked with community partners to host an affordable housing and resource block party in the town of Springfield, where more than half of the residents are renters. Music, food, and children's activities attracted a crowd to the event where REALTORS®, bankers, and lenders handed out information and answered questions about homebuying. The association received a \$5,000 Housing Opportunity Grant from the REALTOR® Party to host the event while dozens of members volunteered.

Tour for workforce housing. The **Madera Association of REALTORS®**, Calif., teamed up with the local school district to hold a bus tour of affordable homes for new and potential teachers. All attendees received a home booklet with listings, advice on using a REALTOR®, and advertisements from affiliate sponsors including lenders and insurance companies. The post-tour luncheon gave the association a forum to educate teachers about the homebuying process and area housing options.

Fight veteran homelessness. This summer the **Austin Board of REALTORS®** responded to its mayor's call to end homelessness among its U.S. veterans. With a \$15,000 Housing Opportunity Grant from the REALTOR® Party, the association funded a program to transition homeless veterans into long-term housing. The association's many property management members were an invaluable resource for securing rental housing stock for the veterans. The association's charitable foundation also provided \$5,000 to a fund called Housing for Heroes that mitigates risk for potential landlords. Association CEO Paul Hilgers says the project has been a great opportunity for REALTORS® to demonstrate their leadership in Austin's business community. "It has been politically meaningful, as well, being involved in an area not typically thought of as 'REALTOR® territory.' Our involvement has helped to establish important relationships with civic leaders working to solve the problems of homelessness."



▲ **Host a housing expo.** Partnering with the city of Joliet, Ill., the chamber of commerce, and local employers, the **Three Rivers Association of REALTORS®** used a \$4,000 REALTOR® Party Housing Opportunity Grant to host a housing expo in April that showcased local housing stock, the area's high quality of life, and the amenities of the city. Expo attendees took part in guided tours of area affordable homes on the market. The event was prominently featured in local media.

Youth & Opportunity

Inspiring and encouraging the neighbors of tomorrow.



▲ **Feature dreams homes.** The **Santa Cruz County Association of REALTORS®**, Calif., partnered with the Soquel Unified School District to produce an 18-month calendar called “Protecting the American Dream,” which promotes the use of REALTORS®. “Elementary and middle school students drew what their home would look like,” says association CEO Kathy Hartman. “We had 135 submissions and could only choose 18, but we will be doing this again with the Boys & Girls Club next year.” Calendar sales have been robust as members buy copies to use as a closing gift or a “thank you.” The project budget was \$5,000 to produce the calendars, buy prizes for the participants, and host a launch party. Calendar proceeds are split between the association and the school district.



◀ **Fulfill wishes.** REALTORS® with the **Greater Piedmont Area Association of REALTORS®**, Va., asked their four local Boys & Girls Clubs for a wish list of needed supplies. “REALTORS® collected all the items, including sports equipment, arts and crafts supplies, books, board games, school supplies, and an impressive \$6,565 in donations,” says association CEO Debbie M. Werling.

Raise kids' spirits. Putting their home staging and interior design skills to work, members of the **Lakeland Association of REALTORS®**, N.Y., create bedroom makeovers for local children in need. Over the past four years the association has offered this spirit-boosting program to kids from the local Boys & Girls Clubs of America, a local school for developmentally challenged children, and this year to two children from police families and one child with cancer. Members donate their time and money, and sponsors provide furniture and supplies. Local media covered the event.

Fund deserving charities. Aiming to maintain member involvement in its community outreach programs, the **Capital Area Association of REALTORS®**, Ill., selects a different organization every year to be the primary benefactor of its many fundraising events. The association's Community Service Committee this year chose the Refuge Ranch, a horse ranch offering programs for at-risk children and families in central Illinois. The association raised \$17,000 from a trivia night fundraiser, live and silent auction, holiday raffle, and sale of mulligans at its annual golf outing.

YPN Groups Expand Outreach Activities

YPN (Young Practitioners Network) groups at associations nationwide have expanded community outreach efforts, AEs report. These groups gravitate toward social events with a purpose.

▶ At the **Bay East Association of REALTORS®**, Calif., its YPN is working to end childhood hunger thousands of meals at a time. On Aug. 5, Bay East YPNers gathered at the Kids Against Hunger Bay Area facility to pack nearly 8,000 meals, network, and have fun. “Bay East YPN prides itself on not having only networking events over cocktails, but rather doing something good and giving back,” says David C. Stark, the association's public affairs director.



◀ At the **Chicago Association of REALTORS®**, its YPN group hosted a “Give Back” day at the Union League Boys & Girls Club where 60 kids between the ages of 11 and 16 enjoyed pizza, chips, drinks, and games, while REALTORS® answered questions about pursuing a career in real estate.

Support children in need. Proving that no association is too small to have a big impact in its community, the 82-member **Greater Mason City Board of REALTORS®**, Iowa, partners with its local food bank, The Salvation Army, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Meals-on-Wheels. A recent addition to its community outreach program is My Happy Place, a local nonprofit that provides room makeovers for children suffering from illness, disease, or emotional distress. “The REALTORS® raise every dollar they use in each project, and then donate their time and talent to paint walls to transform a child’s bedroom,” says association EO Amber Scholl.

Sometimes a charitable organization will contact the board for help; in other cases, a REALTOR® will suggest a cause that could benefit from the board’s involvement. “Our members live here, and have family here, and have a reason to be invested in the community beyond the benefit that it brings to their business,” says Julie McQuaid, 2016 president of the board. “This is a group that understands the importance of being a positive influence in the community.”

The association established a Community Outreach Task Force from a handful of

REALTORS® and two staff members who meet monthly with area groups to implement plans for broad-ranging and frequently occurring volunteer opportunities and fundraising events.

REALTORS® and staff who volunteer for these projects proudly wear their blue REALTOR® T-shirts or jackets, and the community is very much aware of the good that REALTORS® are doing, says McQuaid. The board promotes its volunteer opportunities through its website, its Facebook page, email blasts, and direct phone calls and in its monthly membership newsletter.



▲ **Drive backpack donations.** Members of the **Knoxville Area Association of REALTORS®** presented 241 backpacks, filled with school supplies, to the nonprofit Youth Villages on Aug. 5. This was the sixth year in a row that KAAR sent hundreds of local, disadvantaged children to school with brand-new backpacks and all the school supplies they need to succeed. The association’s community involvement committee raised more than \$15,000 to fund the effort.

Grant Money

REALTOR® Party grants from the National Association of REALTORS® fund hundreds of local association outreach programs every year. Apply at realtoractioncenter.com.

- Housing Opportunity Grant
- Smart Growth Grant
- Diversity Grant
- Placemaking Micro-Grant
- Game Changer Program Grants

The REALTOR® Party has awarded \$500,000 in grants so far this year.

SMALL BOARD
This association applied for matching-funds grants from the REALTOR® Party and the REALTOR® Foundation of Iowa.



▲ **Give to the Boys & Girls Club.** This summer the **St. Louis Association of REALTORS®** solicited school supply donations to fill 500 association-branded backpacks for kids at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater St. Louis.



▲ **Volunteer at the Boys & Girls Club.** A member of the **Royal Palm Coast REALTOR® Association, Fla.**, paints at a local BGCA. In all, REALTORS® have contributed their time or funds to support 205 local Boys & Girls Clubs that serve nearly 20,000 kids. REALTOR® associations, individual members, and brokerage firms have donated more than \$100,000 to local clubs.



REALTOR® Care Day in Ohio, REALTORS® Care Day in North Carolina and New Jersey, and REALTOR® Action Day in North Carolina, are programs that coordinate members' various volunteering efforts on a single day, which creates larger events with more participants, more work accomplished, and more media coverage.

Amplify Your Outreach With Collaborative Events

By Shane Johnson, CEO, Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS®, N.C.

Imagine 30 percent of your membership engaged in dozens of community outreach activities on the same morning, generating media attention and thousands of social media posts. At my association, the **Wilmington Regional Association of REALTORS®** in North Carolina, we call that RAD, or REALTOR® Action Day, now in its second year.

Nearly 580 members of the Wilmington association in May joined dozens of members of the neighboring **Topsail Island Association of REALTORS®** to visit senior centers, plant sea oats to stabilize the beach, rake leaves at parks, install landscaping at community centers, and erect fences at youth centers, among other activities.

"In all my years of membership, this is the best event we've

ever done," says Sherri Pickard, association past president.

Beyond the great publicity we received and the good works done, RAD recreated that feeling of membership unity that can get lost in the REALTOR® community. "RAD also builds the REALTOR® brand in light of community service, which helps better position the image of the association in the community and with key decision-makers," says Adrienne Cox, Wilmington's public affairs director.

For years, members have individually participated in community acts and charitable events, and they continue to do so. Yet with the new focus on REALTOR® associations' Core Standards requirement for community outreach, we knew we needed

to put the full resources of the association behind an effort that would make a big statement.

Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo, also a REALTOR®, participated in RAD both years. "This event has had substantial impact in the region," he says. "Beyond the goodwill that has been built up for WRAR the past two years, REALTORS® are increasingly seen as active contributors to the community, neighborhood by neighborhood."

Arlene Miller, AE at the adjacent Topsail Island Association of REALTORS®, says that although the community exposure is great, members participate in RAD because they enjoy it. "It's also been a great way to collaborate with a neighboring association," she says.



A similar multiassociation one-day effort, REALTOR® Care Day, has been underway in central Ohio since 2005, contributing nearly \$369,000 in improvements and repairs and hundreds of hours of service.

"It's really something to see how much we can accomplish in one day," says John Royer, 2016 president of the **Columbus Board of REALTORS®, Ohio**. "But what's really heartwarming is the appreciation from the homeowners as well as the organizations. This is such a rewarding event for everyone involved."

The **Charlotte Regional REALTORS® Association's** REALTORS® Care Day, like ours, is a one-day event with simultaneous projects. In 2016, the association's ninth annual event attracted nearly 700 members to take part in home improvement projects throughout the area. There's also an annual REALTORS® Care Day sponsored by the **North Central Jersey Association of REALTORS®,** that will ex-

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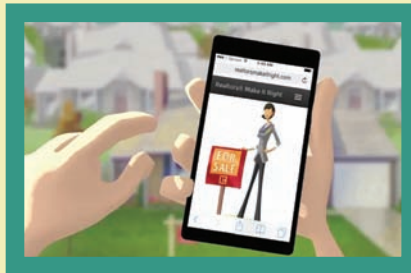
pand to a statewide program in 2017 with the support of the New Jersey Association REALTORS®. The Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® held its eighth annual Realtors® Reach Out month in October. Nearly 30 local associations sponsored events ranging from food drives to neighborhood clean ups.

RAD has a great payoff but it requires adequate financial resources, association collaboration, and staff hours to run smoothly. We provide project materials, tools, volunteer T-shirts, and the celebration barbecue meal, and this year we had seven business partner sponsors to help foot the bill. In addition, each town in which we planted sea oats donated about \$2,000 worth of the plants. We also received an NAR Placemaking Micro-Grant to help fund building a community garden as part of RAD. Plus, we did a special project with our commercial members in which we landscaped the Community Boys & Girls Club, installed a new fence, and then hosted a celebration party with 108 youth members.

In addition to funding, promoting RAD and soliciting volunteers is critical. RAD is scheduled the first Tuesday of April—the usual time slot for weekly real estate office meetings, so it's important for brokers to reschedule for that week. "We also make calls to members and visit dozens of offices to register folks," says Cox. "This is especially important in the first year."

"In year one we mobilized about 20 percent of membership," says Pickard. "This year we moved 30 percent into the field, and our goal is 40 percent in 2017."

REALTOR® Action Day is a scalable program that any local REALTOR® association can launch. Contact me at shane@wrar.com for a free planning kit.



▲ **Promote members.** "REALTORS® Make It Right" is the slogan for the outreach campaign from the Charlotte Regional REALTORS®, N.C., that includes digital, mobile, and print advertising, social media outreach, a website (realtorsmakeitright.com), local TV spots, and outdoor digital billboard advertising all aimed at promoting the use of a REALTOR®. "We increased the budget from \$100,000 last year to \$175,000 this year," say association president Maren Brisson-Kuester. "That's an extremely modest spend by advertising standards, but because of our creative approach (engaging, light-hearted animation) and using association staff and our members for voice-over narration, we can devote a high percentage of our dollars to actual ad purchases, not production costs. It's a great value that is yielding results."

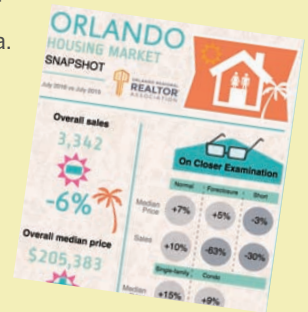
► **Make media appearances.** The West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS® took to the airwaves this year to promote benefits of working with REALTORS® in a series of commercials running on five radio stations. "The public seems to like these, and members find them to be a 'feel good' about their association," says CEO Dale Zahn. Association President Doug Klaasen (above right) and Zahn (left) made guest appearances on radio stations several times in 2016. In September the association hosted a "Media Day" luncheon for local print, radio, and TV journalists highlighting all that the association is involved in plus the monthly housing market updates.

Be the source for home sales

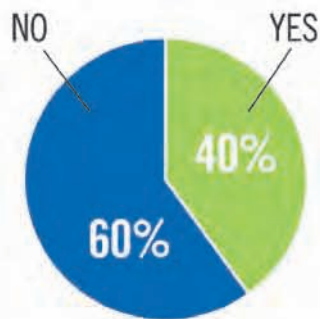
statistics. Like many local REALTOR® associations, the Greater Tulsa Association of REALTORS®, issues monthly home sales statistics to members and the media. The association's statistics are based on the Northeast Oklahoma Real Estate Services' multiple listing service data and are often picked up by local media and used in online articles and blogs, which establishes the association as a credible source of data for the media.

► Put the facts on social media.

The Orlando REALTORS® Association regularly creates shareable market snapshot infographics for social media, and monthly market report videos with easy-to-understand data tables and comparisons.



REALTOR® SAFETY: DID YOU KNOW?*



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▶ SOCIALIZE NAR'S WEEKLY SAFETY TIPS

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**REALTOR®
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The Best Politicians to Back

How to get your board and members on board with candidate selection.

Integrity, transparency, and trust aren't always associated with politics, but they are essential when your association is engaged in the political process of recommending candidates for office. There is no denying that politics is a controversial topic. When representing more than 6,500 members as we do here in Florida at the REALTOR® Association of Sarasota and Manatee, our candidate recommendations won't please everyone, and neither will yours. Accepting this and understanding the importance of why you're involved in the political process will prove to be one of the greatest member benefits for your association.

As a Government Affairs director, I see daily how action—or inaction—by elected officials can negatively affect REALTORS® and their clients. REALTORS® deserve the opportunity to focus on their business without worry that another unnecessary burden will affect their livelihood. These burdens may include ordinances banning For Sale signs or, more extreme, a sales tax on service that equals a further tax on commission. These burdens are easier to avoid when our supporters, aka REALTOR® Champions, are elected to office.

I often tout that REALTORS® don't merely sell property, they sell entire communities.

Whether those communities are residential or commercial, clients look for good schools, sound infrastructure, reasonable cost of living, and other variables that are affected by who's in office. Our involvement in the political process ensures that our members have a quality community to sell because of quality elected officials.

The process of getting a REALTOR® Champion elected varies by association. What works here in Sarasota and Manatee may not work in other associations. Establishing a process that works for your association may take a few tries, just as it did for us, but it will come together.

We start at the beginning of each election cycle, when the RASM Political Action Advisory Committee identifies which local and state races the organization is interested in. We focus solely on offices that can come into conflict with our policy positions. Through our candidate vetting process, each candidate is asked to complete a profile that covers basic information so that the time allotted for an interview is focused on our issues, not theirs. Our PAAC members then rate each candidate based on the quality of their interview and how their responses align with our public policy positions. After a total tally of individual scores and a verbal vote of members, a recommendation may be made

to the RASM board. A recommendation may further include a request for a monetary contribution as well as use of REALTOR® Party resources. Our board then reviews all pertinent information before a final decision is made. Although our board gets the final say, some associations give full autonomy to the selection committee and don't allow their board to overturn their decision.

Our involvement in the political process ensures that our members have a quality community to sell because of quality elected officials.

Our candidate selection process involves 33 REALTOR® members between our PAAC and board. It's common for REALTOR® associations to include major investors on the selection team, a great major-investor benefit. However the committee is composed, each member must understand the importance of their recommendations and that integrity must remain the top priority. Prior to each round of interviews, members are asked to identify any possible conflicts of interest, which may include monetary



donations, personal endorsements, or even simple praise on social media. Should the committee decide a sufficient conflict is present, that member is excluded from voting but still able to participate in the discussion. Their input is valuable because there is a reason they have decided to support a given candidate.

As humans, we are inherently biased. Most of the members on our selection committee are extremely involved in politics or they would have no interest in being on the committee. What I greatly respect is their ability to understand their role and set their personal party affiliation and beliefs aside to do what's best for the organization. I've had members share that they won't personally vote for a recommended candidate but that they understand why the organization is behind that particular individual. That's when you know the process is working.

After the candidate has been selected, your organization must spread the word to get him or her elected. Having a well-established process will allow you to demonstrate why a candidate was chosen. Over time, as the culture of political involvement within your associ-

ation grows, most members tend to find that so does the support of the recommended candidates and the process.

As the largest professional organization in the country, our strength is in numbers. Most successful associations take advantage of that through grassroots efforts. Your association can determine the level of involvement for each race. Simply putting your REALTOR® association name behind a candidate does go a long way, but using REALTOR® Party resources can often lead your REALTOR® champions to victory.

For any REALTOR® associations looking to get involved or wanting to reevaluate their process, government affairs directors and other associations can share what works. By reaching out to associations of various sizes and levels of involvement, you will piece together what works for you.



Adam R. Davis is government affairs director at the REALTOR® Association of Sarasota and Manatee, Fla. Contact him at 941-952-3410 or adam@myrasm.com.

Host Your Own Candidate Training Academy

Often the best REALTOR® Champions are REALTORS® themselves. That's the idea behind the Candidate Training Academy. It gives REALTORS® interested in running for political office an introduction to and expectation of how to run for elected office. It is intended to give candidates a valuable head start in their political journeys and information on how to run successful campaigns.

State or local associations can host this day-long program either with an NAR-provided facilitator or their own. NAR has conveniently established a core curriculum that consists of seven chapters. Associations may use the outlined core curriculum, or pick and choose the curriculum that best suits their candidates' needs. Materials are available from NAR at no cost to associations and are provided as a direct result of the REALTOR® Party Initiative.

For more, contact Kyle Lambert London at klambert@realtors.org or 202-383-1203.

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Boost Your Social Media Reach

How to use the metrics about your fans, follows, likes, mentions, and shares to build a better a communications plan.

From click rates and impressions to fans and followers, social media sites and email services make it easy to measure how many members you're reaching with your posts. It's great to have all this data at your fingertips. But what do you do with it all? How can metrics help guide your communications to win your members' attention and increase their engagement with your association?

At the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS®, Md., we dug into our data and discovered meaningful trends that have inspired new approaches to using our communications vehicles. Here's what we did and how it could work for your association:

Take a long-term view of social media

Social media is all about immediacy. The sites show your traffic in real time. The open screen of a metrics page typically shows daily visits, views, and clicks on your most recent posts, and changes to your number of followers or fan base. This information is terrific if you are trying something new and want immediate feedback on how a campaign is being received or need to quickly measure if your call to action is getting any traction.

But while weekly information is interesting, it may not help you figure out what type of Facebook content your members want more of or what will get them engaged on Twitter. If you aggregate your data into quarterly and annual reports and look at your top posts over a 12-month period, you'll get a more accurate picture of the type of information your members respond to. What made it into your annual top five?



At GCAAR, we found that our most popular Facebook post was a link to a *Washington Post* article about a new sales contract, which reached four times as many people as our second-most popular post.

Dig deeper

Now that you are looking at the big picture, search for patterns. Look at your top five posts and your bottom five posts. Patterns may appear by content (education, legislation, contracts, new member benefits, or other topics), links, photos or images, hashtags, or countless other ways.

We found that four of our five most-popular Facebook posts included pictures of members during association meetings and events.

Change what you do

Analyzing your data is an enormous waste of time and resources if it doesn't improve your output. Translate your patterns into a

communications plan. Writing out a plan, no matter how basic, will help you organize your goals and ideas, set and keep realistic timelines, and measure your success.

For example, we plan to post more photos of members on Facebook and we've set up a system to ensure that everyone in the picture is tagged.

Build support for your plan

Share your data, analysis, and conclusions with your communications committee or directors, fellow staff members, and any other stakeholders whose buy-in you need to make your plan successful. If your analysis suggests going in a different direction, adding a new social media outlet, or dropping a communications channel altogether, you'll need the support of your stakeholders to make those changes work.

Get inspired

If your members aren't engaged, try a new

Social media beyond Facebook

Interested in increasing your social media reach but not sure which platform to add? Give some thought to the generation you want to reach. According to the Pew Research Center, 55 percent of internet users ages 18–29 are on Instagram, but LinkedIn is the only social media platform for which usage rates are higher among 30–49-year-olds than among 18–29-year-olds. There's also YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Twitter to consider.

voice, a different look, or a unique approach. There are countless resources to inspire great social media posts online. Look at what others are doing. Google "great subject lines" or "awesome association posts" and you'll be amazed at what's out there for you to adapt. When you find something that resonates with your members, follow its direction and use it as a beacon for your future postings.

Don't forget to look at metrics across your entire communications vehicle spectrum. Your email marketing platform should, at a minimum, provide open rates and click-through rates. For metrics on print publications, you'll need good old-fashioned surveys and focus groups. Keep in mind that comparing this data to your social media metrics will be apples to oranges, so take any comparison with a grain of salt. Social media can engage your members in ways that just aren't possible with email and print but can suck up staff resources at an astounding rate. Balancing your staff's time within the channels that are most effective will prove impossible if you aren't measuring the reach and resonance of all your communications.

One of our priorities for the rest of this year is to reinvigorate our Twitter following. Instead of retweeting everything we post on Facebook, our first experiment will be to use Twitter primarily during association events and getting attendees to do the same. We'll measure as we go to see how it works.

In short: Look at your all-time best posts, figure out what made them great, and do more. Being strategic in how you approach social media will help focus your communications resources in the channels that work best with your members.



Amy Ritsko-Warren, RCE, is a project strategist at the Greater Capitol Area Association of REALTORS®, Md. Contact her at 301-590-8777 or awarren@gcaar.com.

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Pros and Cons of Establishing a Charitable Organization

Now that every association is required to conduct community outreach under the Core Standards program, many are establishing separate charitable organizations to better manage their efforts.

In August, the 1,000-member Fort Collins Board of REALTORS®, Colo., received final IRS approval for its Future of Housing Community Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, which aims to raise tens of thousands of dollars each year to support local housing and affordability efforts.

“We decided to establish a foundation because our budgeted community investments over the years were becoming something we just did because we had always done it,” says association CEO Clint Skutchan, RCE. The foundation will serve to formalize the association’s commitment to community outreach, boost its public profile as a contributor to the community, and enable the association to leverage additional dollars from the state and national levels, he says.

city of Flint. The new fund, also a 501(c)(3) organization, will be ongoing and provide housing-related assistance to victims of disasters and for other charitable purposes, says association Director of Communications & Marketing Joe Kras.

“Using the foundation approach enables us to better define the scope of our outreach as opposed to raising money for all different kinds of causes,” says Kras.

When an association files its 501(c)(3) paperwork with the IRS, it is required to define a relatively narrow scope of the organization’s purpose.

determine its purpose. What will the goals of the organization be? Which communities or groups will the organization assist? Some associations have charitable organizations with an educational focus, such as the Illinois Real Estate Educational Foundation, a not-for-profit established to aid and promote the work of real estate education throughout the state. Other associations create housing-related organizations, for example the Lexington-Bluegrass Association of REALTORS® 501(c)(3) REALTOR® Community Housing Foundation in Kentucky. Other charities have a broader scope, such as the Santa Clara

“Using the foundation approach enables us to better define the scope of our outreach as opposed to raising money for all different kinds of causes.”

—Joe Kras, Director of Communications & Marketing, Michigan Association of REALTORS®

There are many reasons to establish a charitable giving vehicle such as a public charity, private foundation, community foundation, or a donor advised fund. Usually the most compelling reason to establish a 501(c)(3) is to offer donors a tax write-off. Yet, these organizations also are exempt from paying federal income tax and sales tax on certain purchases.

If you see a 501(c)(3) in your association’s future, there are legal requirements and other important points to consider.

Creating a charitable organization

The first step in creating a charity is to

County REALTORS® Foundation, a 501(c)(3) in California that focuses on giving to housing, education, community projects, social services, and disaster relief.

The purpose of the charitable organization must be one recognized under federal and state law as a permissible purpose for operating a nonprofit. A relief fund that distributes money only to association members, for example, would not meet the criteria for a charity.

The next step is to organize the charity under the state’s nonprofit statutes as either a trust or a corporation. Although state laws differ, generally a trust is used when there is



Taking a more focused approach, the Michigan Association of REALTORS®’ new Michigan REALTORS® Relief Fund was established earlier this year to expedite the receipt and donation of charitable aid from Michigan REALTORS® and others to the water crisis in the

In the wake of the historic floods that swept through southern Louisiana this past summer, the Louisiana REALTORS® launched an ongoing donation effort through its 501(c)(3) organization to provide support for flood victims.



Connecticut Association of REALTORS® Foundation is a 501(c)(3) established in 2009 at the request of the membership so that the association could accept tax deductible contributions and respond quickly to national disasters in Connecticut.

a single donor to the organization, and a corporation is used if the organization is going to solicit multiple contributors. Creating a nonprofit corporation requires drafting articles of incorporation and bylaws, including governance structure, board selection process, general decision-making, required meetings, and conflict-of-interest policies, among others. Also your nonprofit needs a name. Consult your association attorney during the creation of this entity. All of these materials are then filed with your state's secretary of state. If the entity is going to become a federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charity, there is an additional IRS application process that can take several months to complete.

The structure of the charitable organization is established in its bylaws will determine how the REALTOR® association and the organization interact with each other. Although the association should ensure that the charitable organization operates separately, it may want to establish that it will select directors for the charitable entity or require that all directors be members of the association. Adding such requirements will help ensure that the charitable organi-

zation truly represents the association.

Note that charitable your organization must be, through its bylaws, connected to the association to be eligible for coverage through the NAR's Professional Liability Insurance Program for REALTOR® associations. It also needs to be able fit under the insur-

ance policy's definition of "foundation," which is a "charitable trust or corporation ... established for charitable, educational, or research purposes that qualifies as an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code" or that has an exempt purpose as defined by the IRS.

Keep the charity alive

An association considering creating a charitable organization should realize that it takes time and follow-through at the outset, and that there are ongoing responsibilities for maintaining the entity. Associations should make sure they have sufficient staffing to continue operating the charitable organization, including enough people to conduct meetings, solicit donations, promote the organization, and communicate with outside entities that may wish to donate or apply for funding.



The 501(c)(3) Michigan REALTORS® Relief Fund® was established to expedite the receipt and donation of aid from members and supporting organizations in response to the water crisis in the city of Flint.

"If a local association has very limited staff, I'm not sure I'd advise them to establish a fund,"

cautions Kathie Feldpausch, RCE, CAE, Michigan REALTORS® senior vice president and chief financial

officer. "It brings with it all of the filings of a corporation, so you'd want to make sure you understand that it's a living, breathing corporation as much as your association is, but just on a smaller scale."

Charitable organizations typically have the following annual responsibilities:

- Annual state corporation filings
- Federal and state tax returns
- Annual renewal of charitable solicitation license. About 40 states require an entity that is soliciting charitable donations to register with the state. After the initial registration, the license is renewed each year if the entity is going to continue to solicit contributions.
- An annual meeting. As with any corporation, the charitable entity will need to conduct at least an annual meeting and keep corporate records, such as meeting minutes.

Establishing a charity is not right for every association, and not having one doesn't limit the scope of your outreach.

For more information and guidance on setting up a charity, access NAR's 22-page guide "Benevolent Funds: A Toolkit to Charitable Giving," at realtor.org.

Fundraising on Facebook, Just for Charities

Facebook is moving forward with enabling charitable donations on its platform with a program only for IRS-registered 501(c)(3) organizations. Nonprofits can raise money directly from their Facebook page by applying for a new donate button (different from the older "donate now" button) that enables easy two-tap giving by using a donor's saved credit card information in their Facebook account—not sending them to an external donation site. Although it is free for organizations to set up their charity page, Facebook takes 3 percent of all contributions to cover credit card processing and an additional 2 percent to cover costs associated with vetting nonprofits, payment support, operational costs, security, and fraud protection, the company says. Sign up your 501(c)(3) organization at donations.fb.com.



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Sowing the Seeds of Outreach

Norman Morris, RCE, CAE, on the intersection of advocacy and disaster relief

Immediately after strong storms in August sent record-high floodwater through communities in southern Louisiana, the disaster relief program from the state REALTOR® association went into action. At first, the Louisiana REALTORS® worked with four local REALTOR® associations to get gift cards out to affected members and home owners for immediate necessities such as toiletries and food. Next were \$500 grants to help with repairs to homes and property, and after that came funding of up to \$1,000 to pay the mortgages or rents of members and others whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed. Providing aid to flood-affected citizens was a quick and streamlined process.

Louisiana REALTORS® Relief Foundation is a model for the rest of the country. Here, association CEO Norman Morris, who has been with the organization for 20 years, talks about what he has learned to do during a natural disaster, plus how being active in the community politically and legislatively benefits relief activities.

Q. Since your relief foundation was established after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, what have you learned that has made the process run more smoothly?

First, we learned to not underestimate the severity of disasters. We try to act fast and get out ahead of the disaster to make things happen quicker. Another key is to promote the fund, what it's used for, and the resources available, both financial and informational. We created a disaster relief page on our

website that's a huge resource for members and the public on issues like how to get their homes rebuilt, how to handle issues such as flood insurance, FEMA, SBA loans, and mold remediation. After the most recent flooding, we held a webinar with experts to give advice on tax issues as they relate to the flooding and advice on insurance claims, and attorneys talked about how to deal with property sale contracts affected by the flooding.

Over the years, we learned that we need to continuously raise dollars for the fund so that we're equipped financially. We've learned that we need to have a simple and streamlined grant application process and flexible and transparent decision-making. When a disaster occurs, it has to be very simple for REALTORS® and the public to apply for relief funds.

Lastly, we realized that success comes through a clear and supportive relationship between all levels of the organization. We try to be the center point for coordinating resources and funding, but if someone does something better, whether it's national or local, then we defer to them. We're not worried about who gets credit as we go through the process of helping people in need.

Q. How has your association's active role in politics been a benefit when it comes to disaster relief?

Politics and outreach go hand in hand. We've built a strong volunteer culture as far as advocating, investing, voting, and community outreach. We've used REALTOR® Party resources from NAR, and that's enabled us

to do more. We have great working relationships with some of the state agencies and their leaders—as well as with elected officials and their staff—so we're able to get timely and accurate information out to members.

Elected officials really do appreciate our efforts and they look to us as a resource when it comes to helping out with disaster relief, especially with information for home owners. They see REALTORS® out there doing great work in the community all the time with various outreach efforts and I think that only solidifies—along with our grassroots and legislative activities—that we are the voice for real estate. Officials count on us to be a key player in the event of a disaster.

Q. What advice do you have for associations that do not yet have a relief fund?

Disasters occur everywhere, so I would tell them to take a hard look at creating some type of program where they could provide resources, either financial or nonfinancial, to help people in a time of need. It's the right thing to do. It's important to show that REALTORS® not only support each other but also give back to help their neighbors.

Unfortunately, we've had our share of disasters, and they're not easy to go through, but our members are very resilient. The great thing I've seen through all the disasters is the kind, caring, and giving nature of REALTORS®. They are out there helping people get back on their feet. It's a rewarding thing to be a part of.

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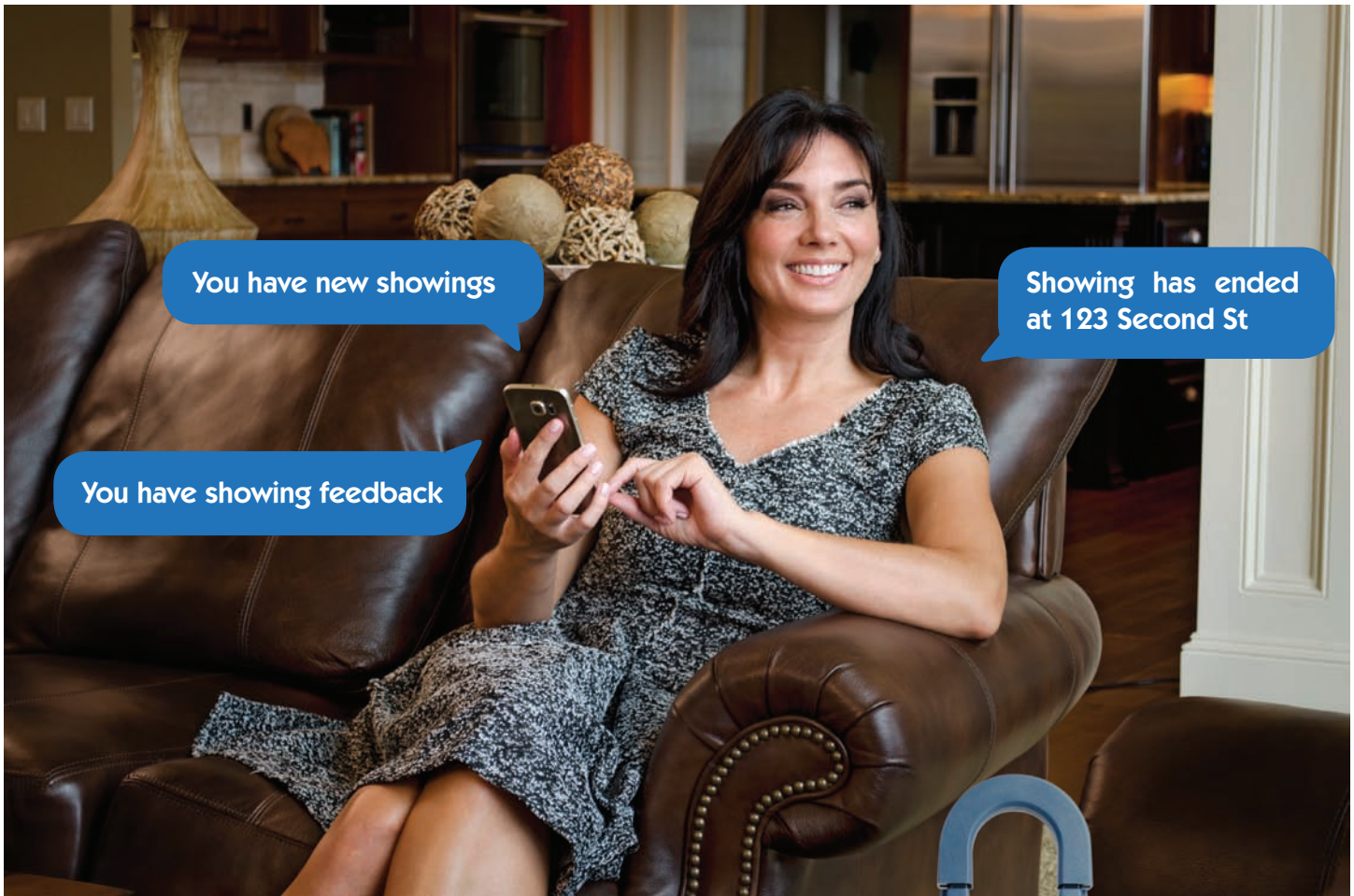


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