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REALTOR® AE

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WINTER 2022

The New Normal Is **HYBRID**

Build a tech capability that meets members' expectations.

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Calibrating Hybrid

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Everyday Virtual

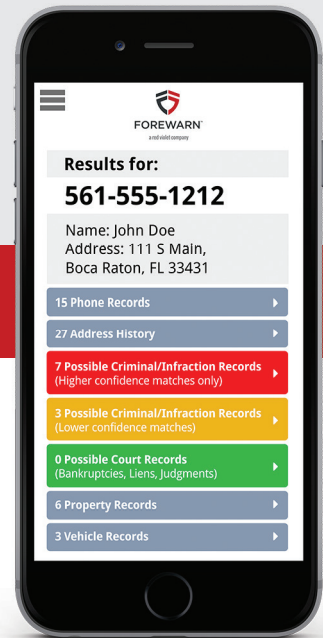
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Meeting Our Members Where They ‘R’

I'm honored and excited for the opportunity to lead the National Association of REALTORS® Association Executive Committee in 2022, and I look forward to sharing the group's vision for the coming year.

During 16 years serving REALTOR® associations, most recently as CEO of the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS®, I've benefited greatly from collaboration with my AE peers from across the country. My colleagues on the AEC and I aim to leverage the experience and creativity of the AE community to promote innovation and collaboration that benefits our associations, our members, and the industry.

In thinking about the “hybrid” concept highlighted in this issue, it struck me that hybrid reaches well beyond the notion of in-person and online engagement. It requires associations to reach further, identifying all-new ways to provide programs, products, services, and engagement opportunities.

Associations must create stronger, more nimble, dynamic, and future-focused organizations where member engagement is everyone's responsibility and we are aligned behind one core belief: that associations will meet members where they are based on how they do business. Through this lens, the AEC will pursue and accomplish its established goals in 2022.

Discussion among AEC members over the past year has centered on the use of a variety of strategies and tools, combined with existing resources, to “Meet Members Where They R.” We're also exploring ways to raise the bar as an association and profession. In partnership with the



AE community, we will focus on four main themes in 2022:

- Identifying innovative ways to enhance member experiences that help associations connect with members and deliver services in a way that aligns with how members do business;
- Embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion by identifying resources to create meaningful, sustainable DEI programs and leadership opportunities;
- Recognizing, rewarding, and incentivizing local and state associations to excel, improve, and innovate so the REALTOR® organization can thrive in the future; and
- Developing a shared set of positive, aspirational principles of association leadership that can serve as a model

and guiding philosophy for volunteer and staff leaders.

As we contemplate innovative and collaborative ideas throughout the year and reimagine the way REALTOR® associations operate, I encourage us to work with our colleagues and volunteer member leaders to create an environment of excellence and professional success. Jessica Coates, 2022 AEC vice chair, and I look forward to being your partners in advancing the “R.” ■



Ryan T. McLaughlin, CAE, RCE, is CEO of the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® and 2022 AEC chair.



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NAR's core values are Members First, Leading Change, Respect, Collaboration, Communication, and Diversity & Inclusion. NAR actively supports the federal Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing because of race or color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and handicap or disability. NAR's Code of Ethics also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.



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REALTOR® AE magazine archives are available online at nar.realtor/RAE. Reprint permission: Contact Wilma Veal, wveal@nar.realtor. Distribution: Local and state executive officers, association staff, and local and regional MLS directors.

Going Global

The Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® hosted its third annual international-themed “convention-within-a-convention,” Global Connect, during its October 2021 hybrid convention and trade show. An initiative that helped NVAR achieve Diamond recognition in the National Association of REALTORS®’ 2021 Global Business Council Achievement Program, this year’s Global Connect featured visits with ambassadors to the United States from Moldova and Guatemala.

Moldovan Ambassador Eugen Caras joined members at a luncheon held at NVAR’s Fairfax, Va., headquarters, offering a gift of Moldovan wine and speaking about potential partnership opportunities. Also as part of Global Connect programming, NVAR member Mayra Pineda, the NAR President’s Liaison to Guatemala, visited

the Guatemalan embassy in Washington, D.C., to conduct a recorded interview with Ambassador Alfonso Quiñón Lemus.

As part of its global strategy, NVAR develops programming with its standing Hispanic, Korean, Vietnamese, and International Business Forum groups and offers annual Certified International Property Specialist (CIPS) training. In 2021, the association participated in an International Day of Friendship and held a Global Success Month featuring content designed

to build members’ global expertise and opportunities jointly with the Long Island (N.Y.) Board of REALTORS®, the Miami Association of REALTORS®, and the North Carolina Association of REALTORS®.

Learn more at [NVAR.com/global](https://www.nvar.com/global). ■



Left to right: NVAR’s Mayra Pineda, the NAR president’s liaison to Guatemala; Thai-Hung Nguyen, 2022 NVAR secretary/treasurer and 2021 chair of NAR’s Global Business & Alliances Committee; Eugen Caras, Moldovan ambassador to the U.S.; Ryan McLaughlin, NVAR CEO; Derrick Swaak, 2021 NVAR president; Mariana Koegel, 2021 chair of the NVAR Global Leadership Advisory Group; Christine Richardson, 2019 NVAR president; and Nicholas Lagos, 2021 NVAR immediate past president.

HCAR Helps Neighbors in Need

Heeding the call of 2021 National Association of REALTORS® President Charlie Oppler, the Howard County (Md.) Association of REALTORS® sprang into action to participate in REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors Volunteer Days in October.

HCAR tapped its more than 2,200 members to collect donations for Columbia Community Care, an organization that provides essential supplies to local families in need. Dozens of members staffed distribution sites wearing blue REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors T-shirts and handing out donated food, toiletries, diapers, and other supplies to area residents.

HCAR’s 2021 President, Shirley Matlock, spearheaded the effort and says giving back is a part of who REALTORS®



Members wore their REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors T-shirts to distribute goods for Columbia Community Care.

are as people and professionals. “We encouraged our members who have a heart for service and a passion for giving back to participate in this worthy initiative, and they answered the call in a big way,” she says.



HCAR CEO Jessica Coates says the experience was uplifting and inspirational. “To not only provide the organization with donated supplies, but also physically hand those donations to the people who need them, was truly an amazing experience,” she says. ■



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Finding Fairhaven

When the National Association of REALTORS® launched its Fairhaven interactive fair housing tool in 2020, Virginia REALTORS® embraced the platform immediately and wanted to get more members on board for training. So Beth Dalton, the association's 2021 president, challenged the state's more than 36,000 REALTORS® to complete the self-paced, no-cost program.

"After seeing how real the scenarios were and realizing that I did not know as much about fair housing as I thought I did, I knew it was essential that Virginia REALTORS® push this out to our members," Dalton says. "The Fairhaven Challenge [was] a major priority during my presidential term, and I am so glad NAR created such an informative, user-friendly platform."

The Fairhaven Challenge fostered friendly competition among Virginia's 28 local associations. Each month, Virginia REALTORS® sent a status report to local association executives with the total number and overall percentage of Fairhaven completion among their members. Many local associations took the challenge to the next level by congratulating members on social media after they completed the module or requiring Fairhaven at their new member orientations.

The initial promotion and the "Fairhaven Fridays" Virginia REALTORS® held during Fair Housing Month helped make REALTORS® more aware of the tool and the Fairhaven Challenge. The challenge attracted national attention and inspired other state associations to follow suit.

The five Virginia associations with the highest percentage of Fairhaven completion were honored with an award at the association's annual convention and centennial celebration in



From left, Quinton Beckham, CAAR president; Leslie J. Frazier, Virginia REALTORS® senior vice president of Community and Industry Relations; and Abby Tammen, CAAR CEO.

September 2021. The winning associations were:

1. Charlottesville Area Association of REALTORS®
2. Bristol Tennessee-Virginia Association of REALTORS®
3. Chesapeake Bay and Rivers Association of REALTORS®
4. Harrisonburg-Rockingham Association of REALTORS®
5. Lynchburg Association of REALTORS®

Although the challenge has ended, Virginia REALTORS® continues to promote Fairhaven among members and encour-



CAAR's first-place award

ages other states to join the effort to ensure that housing is indeed fair. ■

—Leslie J. Frazier, senior vice president,
Community and Industry Relations,
Virginia REALTORS®



Good Neighbor Awards

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2022
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Congratulations to New RCEs

These 26 REALTOR® association executives earned their REALTOR® association Certified Executive designation after an extensive course of study and exam. RCE is the only designation created specifically for REALTOR® association executives. It exemplifies goal-oriented AEs with drive, experience, and commitment to professional growth. For designation requirements and more information, visit nar.realtor/rce.



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Association of
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Allegheny Highland
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REALTORS®, Pa.



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David Ramirez, RCE
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Padre Island Board of
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Christine Schachter, RCE
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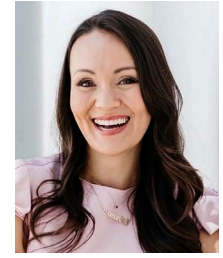
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Character Study

The Power of Understanding People offers transformative tools for discovering individual strengths.

As association executives know, it's sometimes difficult to adjust to having a new president (and/or leadership team) every year or every other year. By the time you and your president get to know each other, it's time for the next person to take the gavel. It's beneficial when you can start each new term knowing as much as possible about each other's likes, dislikes, communication styles, and expectations.

Many of us conduct leadership training with our governing board members to get that much-needed head start on working together, but you might still find that you could use a better way to truly understand who you're working with (and they you). That's where a book I've been recommending, *The Power of Understanding People* by Dave Mitchell, comes in.

This book changed everything for me. Where it differs from the hundreds of management books I've pawed through over the years is that it gave me a tool I feel comfortable using in my everyday interactions. It's about learning who your leaders are and how to strengthen the relationships you have with them personally and professionally.

Fascinated by human behavior, Mitchell outlines 12 personality types, each of which has a specific communication style: The Best Friend, The Love Interest, The Crusader, The Hired Gun, The Sage, The Power Broker, The Voice of Reason, The Specialist, The Detective, The Eccentric, The Social Reformer, and The Adventurer. Sounds like your average board, right? Figuring out who's who will help make your team stronger.

Many times in many readings, I stopped and thought about my board of directors and how I could use this information to better understand each of them and help them better understand me. I am now incorporating the book into staff and leadership training to discover each person's "superpowers."

Once you correlate the personality types to individual staffers and volunteer leaders, *The Power of Understanding People* suggests using a mnemonic relating your assessment of each person to popular culture and historical figures, similar to the way you might try to remember the name "Bob" by relating it to the movie *What About Bob?* Let's say your new president—Mark—is

an Adventurer; thinking "Marco Polo" can help you remember that and communicate accordingly.

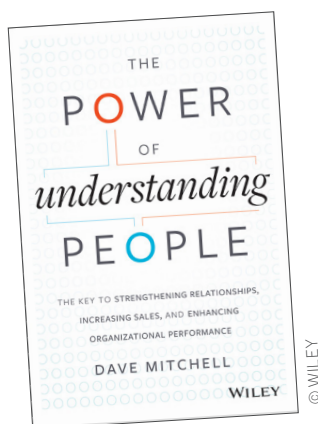
Most approaches to understanding different communication styles are clinical and forgettable—who wants their style reduced to letters or colors? This book pegs various styles to recognizable Hollywood characters, historical figures, and famous people, making it easy to apply specific styles to your colleagues.

Through personal experiences, Mitchell also helps readers gain insights into their own interaction styles and teaches them how to communicate, motivate, understand, and lead more successfully, no matter what personality types may be involved. Armed with this knowledge, you'll be able to provide service, resolve conflicts, and build relationships better.

And as a bonus, you can use *The Power of Understanding People* in your personal life, too! ■



Kim Cox, GRI, is CEO of Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS® in Joplin, Mo.



Most approaches to understanding different communication styles are clinical and forgettable—who wants their style reduced to letters or colors?

Governing Forward

Several areas of NAR's governance overhaul depend on AEs' support.

The National Association of REALTORS® board and delegates approved all but one of the Governance Game Changer Presidential Advisory Group's recommendations at the 2021 REALTORS® Conference & Expo in November. Here's a rundown of the changes that will affect AEs:

New Town Halls

Effective immediately, each local association president will be invited to attend a Town Hall meeting in the 30 days prior to each board of directors meeting. The goal of the meeting is to inform presidents about NAR business and get feedback on any motions the board will be considering at the upcoming meeting.

What this means for AEs: You'll want to remind your president to attend Town Hall meetings.

Board Composition, Allocations, and Appointments

Board composition and structure will change in 2023. Local and state association director allocations will be determined using a formula based on a percentage of NAR members, with state and local association allocations determined independently of one another. Each state and territory association will receive two additional seats allocated specifically to small and medium-sized local associations.

Visit govpag.realtor for a comparison of current and new allocations. State and local associations will be required to submit the names of their appointed NAR directors to NAR by Sept. 15 of the year prior to their service.

What this means for AEs: NAR will contact AEs early this year with details on the submission process. Be forewarned:

Failure to submit director names to NAR in a timely manner constitutes forfeiture of allocated appointments.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee will now meet four times per year. Its composition will remain very similar to its current composition but will assume authority for committee structure changes, committee recommendations, and policy positions (with some exceptions) from the board of directors.

What this means for AEs: Nothing changes for you here!

The RVP's Role

Beginning with the 2024 class of regional vice presidents, the role will change to expressly require the RVP to focus on issues and duties that support NAR initiatives and effective decision-making at the national level as directed by NAR.

What this means for AEs: For regional caucus meetings, NAR will provide a requested agenda containing the business issues that require member perspectives to support informed decision-making at the board of directors meeting. RVPs and AEs can add topics as needed or as time allows.

RVP Elections

Beginning with the 2024 class, NAR will facilitate an electronic vote of all NAR directors in a region to elect a regional vice president candidate. RVP candidates will need to obtain an endorsement from their home state association, and state associations may endorse more than one qualified member.

What this means for AEs: Candidates will apply directly to NAR, NAR's Credentials and Campaign Rules Committee will

vet candidates, and NAR will handle elections using an electronic voting process. Once a regional election is completed, the winning candidates will be presented to the NAR board of directors. Additional details on the process will be communicated in the coming months.

Volunteer Leader Expectations

NAR's volunteer leaders—directors, Executive Committee members, committee liaisons, committee chairs and vice-chairs, and regional vice presidents—will be required to satisfy specific qualifications and performance expectations starting in 2023 and in 2024. Visit govpag.realtor for details.

What this means for AEs: NAR will manage the process, and each volunteer leader will be expected to self-certify, meaning AEs shouldn't expect to do this on their behalf. For NAR directors, certification forms will need to be completed before the association provides names to NAR on Sept. 15 each year.

We've done our best to alleviate AEs' burden, but as always, we welcome your support and communication with volunteer leaders. NAR is currently determining the best processes for executing several of these changes and will communicate those with AEs and members as soon as possible. Thank you for all that you do to ensure the success of our volunteer leaders! ■



Tyrone Adams, RCE, CAE, is president and CEO of the Colorado Association of REALTORS® and served on the Governance Game Changer PAG.

The New Normal Is

HYBER





Pro-quality audiovisual equipment and connectivity are the price of entry for meeting members' expectations.

BY M. DIANE McCORMICK

Hybrid meetings are here to stay. REALTOR® association members want convenience and safety, and virtual options deliver. And while a budget-minded approach is possible, the REALTORS® of today and tomorrow expect relevant, high-quality experiences that can't be done on the cheap, say association executives who are pioneering delivery of hybrid meetings.

It's part of an association's value proposition, says Aspire North REALTORS® CEO Kimberly Pontius. "Members need training," he says. "They need continuing education credits. They need to be exposed to what's going on in the world around them [when] they're too busy to raise their heads up and do a 360-degree scan. If they need all that and need it quickly, and they want it done in a way that makes it interesting, [hybrid] is the direction we are moving."

Avoiding Missteps

When Howard County Association of REALTORS® first went hybrid with board

and committee meetings, the solution was a laptop in the middle of the room. "The first time we sat down in a meeting and had that laptop sitting on the table and nobody could hear each other or see each other, we knew it was time to do something significant," says HCAR Director of Operations Sarah Rayne.

The association responded by investing in a Logitech Rally Plus videoconferencing kit for the boardroom—a suite of AV tech including cameras, microphones, and monitors. "We respect everyone's level of comfort," says Rayne. "If a member wants to participate and volunteer and give us their valuable input, we do not want them to be unable to do so because they don't feel comfortable coming into the office and attending in-person meetings. We need to make it easy for our members to participate in a hybrid option."

Members affirmed their trust in Florida REALTORS® by registering in record numbers for the 2020 convention, held online—and offered for free. Even as in-person events started to return, some members remained leery, so in 2021 the

association expanded its hybrid options to meet members wherever they felt comfortable. “Members needed a knowledgeable source, and they knew we were here,” says CEO Margy Grant. “We got that engagement and took it to another level.”

In Michigan, Pontius led a multiyear rebranding project that culminated in the installation of hybrid capabilities in 2019. The system offers more than convenient virtual attendance, Pontius says—it allows the association to avoid the influence of brand-blurring middlemen and reinforces the Aspire North brand with custom backdrops. “We control our narrative with our production capabilities,” he says. “It’s not somebody else telling our story.”

For Pontius, a basic tech wish list for office use would include an iPhone 13 Pro for its cinema-quality video, a sturdy tripod, a quality microphone, and a ring light for up-close illumination. That’s about \$2,500, he says, but AEs should consider budgeting twice as much to allow add-ons such as a gimbaled video stabilizer and postproduction editing tools.

“Invest in a really good backdrop with your logo and skip the green screen for now,” Pontius adds. “Then find a kid who can show you how to use the tech, or toss them a few bucks and they may do it for you.”

An Imperative for Quality

Today’s digitally savvy consumers know amateur content when they see it. At Florida REALTORS®, Grant strove to deliver high production values that would meet members’ strict quality expectations—and members responded by flocking to online sessions. “Production quality has to be at the place where someone is willing to stop during the day and tune in,” she says. “Members are telling me, ‘This is what we want, this is what we are interested in, and we will show up.’”

Florida REALTORS® uses its corporate Zoom account for hybrid purposes, skipping more pricey online meeting platforms such as Meeting Play and Freeman, which the association used in the past for a membership conference and governance meetings, respectively. The association’s director of meeting planning learned to operate the account for meetings and presentations mostly through trial and error, but eventually was able to free up speakers and meeting chairs to concentrate on their primary duties.

The flow and structure of hybrid meetings must be preplanned, Grant advises. At one recent hybrid meeting held in a hotel ballroom, cameras were positioned around the room, and monitors were staged every six feet. When virtual attendees spoke, a stan-

dard Zoom setting allowed each to appear solo on the screens, “so you’re not looking at the Brady Bunch,” says Grant.

“We rehearsed, made adjustments, and rehearsed again,” she adds. “Zoom does an incredible job of [making] information available for the users. Our communications and video team did the same thing with [Zoom’s] video options and live-streaming. Preparation and planning are crucial, as is making sure you have the appropriate internet capacity for your event—especially if it’s being done off-site.”

Aspire North outfitted three conference rooms with flexible meeting and production capabilities. Mounted pan-tilt cameras track speakers automatically, and the association’s audio setup is just as whiz-bang as its video. “So many times, people go to Sam’s or Best Buy to get a couple of speakers, wire them up, and think that’s good,”

Pontius says. “It’s not. You need dynamic sound systems that can adjust to the speakers, and you need automated, multipoint video systems so you don’t have to have a technician in the room all the time.”

High-quality production values are essential for the “in the room” feeling that keeps virtual participants engaged and contributing, rather than just logging in while they juggle other tasks, says Rayne.

“You can’t control everything, but we can be intentional about making sure we are doing things that make it as easy as possible for virtual participants to be engaged, such as by making sure they can hear us, making sure they can see us, ensuring that they have all the materials they

need, including them in any votes, and making sure the chair asks if anyone on the call has any input,” she says.

Watching the Budget

For 2022 and 2023, Grant has earmarked the funds necessary to go fully hybrid with Florida REALTORS®’ two largest meetings, especially for high-level information and entertainment sessions. However, she says she has learned that people don’t always “see a monetary value in an online meeting.” That lesson was apparent when the decision to remove a fee from one online meeting sent registrations skyrocketing from six people to 1,500.

In the hybridized atmosphere, however, formerly inactive members are tuning in. “The people coming online didn’t come before,” Grant says. “They didn’t necessarily see the value in coming to Orlando for a convention. But if they have a chance to log on and hear the general counsel speak or the public policy director speak, they’ll do that.”



**“Production quality has to be at the place where someone is willing to stop during the day and tune in.”
—Margy Grant, CEO, Florida REALTORS®**

For hybrid events, Florida REALTORS® strikes a balance between paid in-person attendees and non-paying virtual participants by offering a limited slate of online sessions—perhaps six selected sessions out of 18 presented. Whether free online access will continue for high-end events is a bridge to cross once pandemic conditions have eased, Grant says.

The video-consuming general public has been conditioned to expect free access to virtual meetings and events, Pontius says. For continuing education, they skip fee courses and look for free classes “unless they have a desire to really learn something and see a value in it,” he says. Still, members “expect to hear from you. They expect you to provide them with something way beyond the newsletter.” For time-strapped REALTORS®, he suggests short videos offering messages about trending topics or upcoming events.

To help finance the installation and ongoing operation of high-end audiovisual equipment and software, Pontius recommends pulling money away from the “sacred cows” of associations—holiday parties, golf outings, little-used services—that can no longer justify their costs.

HCAR made its AV system a budget priority, folding it into the planning process instead of borrowing or reallocating funds from other line items. Like Florida REALTORS®, HCAR uses Zoom for hybrid meetings, which keeps costs down while also delivering a familiar experience.

“I want this to be easy,” says Rayne. “I don’t want a complicated system that is going to be outdated in a couple of years. I just want high-quality audiovisual equipment that makes it easy for us to walk in, turn on our computers, start the meeting, and get ready to roll.

“Associations should work with a professional AV company to determine what equipment will best suit their needs,” she adds. “Pricing can fluctuate greatly depending on your needs, how much equipment you need, the quality of the equipment and how many spaces you need to equip. Get an assessment from an AV company in consultation with IT, and go from there. Tell them you’d like several price options. Then figure out which will fit your budget.”

Reaping the Benefits

Hybridized meetings and events are expanding the circle of involvement in associations. At HCAR, even active volunteers appreciate the ability to attend meetings without leaving their offices and homes, Rayne says: “It’s not all about COVID-19.”

As engagement soars at Florida REALTORS®, so do donations to the association’s political action committee, which are now at an all-time high. Hybridizing meetings is “100%” serving the mission of the association and its members, Grant says.

As long as the pandemic continues, associations must accommodate members who feel uncomfortable attending

Hybrid on a Budget

REALTOR® AEs who have invested in hybrid solutions advise against cutting corners, but they offer several tips for containing costs and maximizing the investment:

- Assess existing capabilities, capacity, and quality needs. Write a detailed technology wish list that prioritizes ease of use.
- Leverage the latest smartphones for their expanded video capabilities, but augment them with quality lighting and sound equipment.
- What’s your bandwidth? Make sure you have or can acquire the broadband speed needed to deliver high-quality audiovisual content.
- Reassign unused allocations, such as pandemic-era travel budgets, to the upfront investment required for quality AV equipment.
- Search for gently used equipment—perhaps from an event company that went out of business or a hotel that’s upgrading. Make sure you have someone with the skills necessary to assess and install the equipment.
- IT and AV are not equivalent specialties. Find trained AV specialists at local community colleges, trade schools, and video production companies.
- Work with vendors skilled in business installations. Home entertainment system installers lack expertise in commercial applications.

in-person events, Rayne says—and in the coming months and years, the availability of hybrid events will help spark continued engagement.

“I’ve heard a lot of people say it is so nice to log onto Zoom and participate wherever they are,” she says. “It’s more convenient for them. They have experienced this option that makes it easier for them to participate in the association, in addition to being a little safer.” ■

M. Diane McCormick is a Pennsylvania-based freelance writer and author.

More

Watch the AEI Year-Round webinar on how associations of any size and budget can host engaging virtual meetings and events. nar.realtor/aei-year-round-virtual-sessions



Calibrating Hybrid

Ensure that everyone in the physical and virtual space gets an opportunity to engage.



BY CHUCK KASKY

Recent data suggests that 90% of organizations will adopt some combination of remote and on-site work as they emerge from COVID-19 restrictions. This new model is already bringing dramatic changes in how groups meet, and a combination of in-person attendees and remote participants is already becoming an inevitable component of meetings and events.

While virtual meetings and events extend the reach of our REALTOR® associations and attract more members, challenges remain in online engagement and building trust. Because real estate is such an interactive, face-to-face, transactional profession, our members are naturally gregarious people. Members have expressed to me the belief that the lack of live meetings and events has hampered their ability to connect with others.

It's hard to argue that point, since there is less spontaneity in the virtual world, and attendees are less likely to meet and interact in a virtual space. The lack of personal connection and sometimes the overall seriousness of online events could result in less excitement compared to live settings. That said, there are strategies for navigating the hybrid world to address members' concerns.

Generational Expectations

There's a generational component to hybridizing strategies because our members come from so many cohorts. Baby boomers tend to focus on technology that's easy to use, simple, and convenient.

Members of Generation X often want to know how a meeting will be set up, addressing their desire for preparation before meetings. Use real-world examples in meeting content to address the generation's desire to work with factual information, and ensure you are not wasting their time, because they like to be in control of it.

For Generation Y, include social networking components that support their need to hear peer opinion. Generation Y relies on technology for work, gaming, and entertainment, and will respond if the meeting is fun.

Virtual Togetherness

Participants in a physical meeting room may have an unfair advantage over remote colleagues who might feel disconnected and unable to pick up on social cues. Being in the same room offers a general feeling of community togetherness, and it may be more difficult for someone joining via video to know when they can find

a gap in the conversation to talk. Detecting facial expressions, body language, and the general "vibe" of a meeting is trickier when you're not actually in the meeting. This could lead to those in the room dominating the proceedings and creating a disconnect among colleagues.

Using video in a meeting is powerful, but it isn't as crucial as having good audio. Just as you wouldn't hold an in-person meeting with someone jackhammering in the room, the same consideration applies to ensuring that the audio remote participants hear is clear and strong. Chat is useful, but don't relegate remote attendees' participation to text only.

Consider video from the remote participant's perspective. As you design the meeting, continually ask yourself: What do remote participants need to see to engage completely? They should be able to see the faces of in-room attendees, shared presentations, physical documents or handouts, and content created during the meeting.

Tactics for Integrating All Voices

To design meetings for all attendees, review each activity or exercise, focusing specifically on how remote participants will engage. Consider what tools and techniques—digital or otherwise—can be used to maximize their interaction with in-room attendees. For example, if you need to poll the group, use a platform to collect everyone's input in real time. This puts remote participants on an equal footing, unlike a show of hands or relying on verbal feedback.

If the meeting design calls for putting people into breakout groups, putting all remote participants in a single group sends the wrong message by reinforcing their physical absence. It's worth the extra logistical and technical effort to integrate remote participants across several breakout groups to accentuate their equal status.

Meetings with in-person and remote participants require a bit more forethought, but they can be a valuable tool in today's REALTOR® association. Hopefully, these suggestions will help you run those hybrid meetings productively and seamlessly. ■

To design meetings for all attendees, review each activity or exercise, focusing specifically on how remote participants will engage.



Charles A. Kasky, Esq., RCE, C2EX, AHWD, E-PRO, is CEO of Maryland REALTORS® in Annapolis.





No Short-Term SOLUTIONS

When integrating new technologies into member services, align them to strategic goals.

BY KEVIN JULIANO

When it comes to technology, the struggle is often to correctly identify the problem. But the explosion of software as a service (SaaS) options over the last decade has helped advance the ability of associations to quickly solve every problem under the sun.

If you need to send a text message to all of your members, there's a platform for that. What about an email? Yup, there's another platform. Mobile apps? Easy enough—just don't lose those login credentials.

You can go from start to finish on setting up the next best thing in as little as 10 minutes in some cases. However, therein lies a new question: Does the solution only meet your current needs? Or does it align with the association's strategic goals for the next three to five years?

Technology should be a means toward achieving long-term aspirations for your organization, not an easy fix for the immediate problem.

Beyond the Easy Answer

At the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS®, we ran into this issue a few years ago. One strategic goal underlined the importance of a member benefit that required a new investment in technology. There was a quick answer, but it wasn't the right answer for our future growth.

PAR has been a RAMCO subscriber since 2015. It is our single repository of membership data. Over the last seven years, we have built methods and processes on top of this data to learn about our members and how PAR can better serve them.

Our strategic plan called for the expansion of the PAR Legal Hotline—one of our highest-rated member benefits. A quick solution was to use the technology already in place and move forward. However, that did not set us up for success down the road.

PAR reviewed its technology stack to determine which mission-critical functions were not communicating with each other. We audited our member communications and our long-term goals for providing the best member experience.

We ultimately decided to keep RAMCO for managing membership data and integrate the marketing platform HubSpot and its communications functions into everyday touchpoints with members. Our marketing emails, online and phone inquiries, and web analytics connect back to member data, which allows us to develop communication strategies based on various member actions. Thanks to its investment in HubSpot, PAR was able to quickly and confidently act at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not Phoning It in

Our phone system was up for review in 2020. An internally hosted Voice over Internet Protocol system allowed staff to make and receive calls from PAR's phone lines, but it wasn't the best experience. A shift to Zoom Phone expanded upon the meeting and webinar platform with an easy-to-use application for phone conversations.

Integrating Zoom Phone into HubSpot allowed PAR to track and analyze member outreach like never before. Staff can use the



Technology should be a means toward achieving long-term aspirations for your organization, not an easy fix for the immediate problem.

desktop or mobile app to engage with members as if they were sitting at a desk phone at PAR headquarters.

Opening a member's record during a call allows staff to understand previous interactions and provide notes for future reference. Linking phone interactions with other marketing initiatives has expanded PAR's ability to get a handle on member engagement.

There are lots of SaaS solutions available to address problems like these. But the central question should remain whenever you evaluate the best fit for your organization: How will this solution integrate with the existing infrastructure and set us up for success in the future? ■



Kevin Juliano, CAE, RCE, is chief growth officer for the Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS®.

7 Ways AEs are Using Tech



Expanding virtual offerings. While virtual events can't replace critical personal connections, they can reach a larger, more diverse audience in the real estate profession. Bay East has now conducted town hall meetings, an inaugural gala, a summit with elected officials, committee meetings, marketing groups, and dozens of classes and events virtually. Participation in several of our weekly regional marketing meetings has increased. —*Tricia Thomas, RCE, CEO, Bay East Association of REALTORS®, Calif.*



Connecting with the MLS. One of the greatest technology assets is a relationship with your MLS. Many MLSs provide access to prepackaged local real estate statistics that are ready to be shared with the business media, with association members, and on social media. Sharing the latest statistics is an easy way to position your association and your members as the best local and regional sources of real estate insights. —*Christy Reap, internal communications and media relations director, Bright MLS, Washington, D.C.*



Making forms fast. We use the program Jotform frequently to conduct surveys, take applications, and accept nomination forms. It offers a variety of ways to create a template; when the form is ready, you can copy a link and blast it out to the membership. Members click the link on their phones and enter the requested information, sending it directly to a staff member. It may seem a little old-school, but it's a great tool for soliciting member input on a budget. —*Kim Cox, GRI, CEO, Ozark Gateway Association of REALTORS®, Mo.*



Asking members for feedback. Bay East uses affordable online tools such as SurveyMonkey to better understand who members are, what they need, and how well we are meeting those needs. Our annual member survey includes questions about demographics, brokerage and business activities, and the use and satisfaction with Bay East products and services. Our team learned to use functions such as cross-tab analyses to pinpoint member needs based on experience and location. By using similar questions each year, we have identified trends in the profession that we use extensively in strategic planning and share with members via a high-energy video. —*Tricia Thomas*



Keeping the team together with teleconferencing. Local health regulations shuttered Bay East's brick-and-mortar member service centers in March 2020 and started what has become an almost two-year period of remote work. For the first few weeks, Bay East's management team stayed connected via daily teleconference calls, trying several different hosting platforms before settling on Microsoft Teams. The entire staff now uses Teams daily for text-based communications with each other and scheduled and spontaneous videoconferences. Adding the video component helps preserve a strong team culture among staff, who continue to work remotely. —*Tricia Thomas*



Producing good video with or without fancy gear. Closing our member service center in Pleasanton meant we were unable to use our dedicated video production studio. The initial solution for producing the weekly Bay East BUZZ video without access to a studio was for our on-camera staff to record their segments at home using smartphones. Our video production staff—also working remotely—then stitched the content together using Adobe Premiere Pro. The resulting videos weren't as slick as our pre-COVID videos, but they resonated more with members. Now that local health regulations have relaxed somewhat, our video staff uses quality cameras but uses locations inside and outside the Pleasanton member service center in lieu of a dedicated studio. These videos look even better than the smartphone versions, and the non-studio locations feel warmer and more personal. —*Tricia Thomas*



Getting insights on improving member experience. We use Listen360 to survey members [about] their interactions with our staff and website. A simple, one-question survey asks, "Would you recommend Mainstreet?" and requests a rating from a scale of 0 to 10. If they rate us a 9 or a 10, it's a win! If we get a rating lower than that, we have a staff member reach out personally to ask if there is anything we can do to improve our scores next time. Surveys are sent no more than once every 90 days, so members aren't bombarded with requests, and Listen360 charges a monthly fee based on our membership numbers. —*Kim McCoy, RCE, AHWD, E-PRO, vice president of operations, member services, and RPAC fundraising, Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®, Ill. ■*

Everyday Virtual

Staff and members alike prefer our association's remote options.

Five years ago, an F5 tornado seriously affected our region, and that single event was cause for some deliberate strategic rethinking. We started implementing a stronger disaster recovery plan that included providing services remotely. The silver lining? When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were able to react immediately.

Members never experienced a lapse in service or communication from the moment the HomeTown staff left its brick-and-mortar offices in the spring of 2020. We were completely "open," but operating 100% remotely. We thought it would just be a few weeks before things got back to normal but soon realized that wasn't going to be the case.

Association executives are used to thinking strategically and altering tactics suddenly when necessary. Fortunately, member engagement increased as the pandemic raged; members relied on us more than ever, and we were there for them every step of the way.

As we navigated remote operations, we realized that the majority of our members had already been working more remotely with us, using the website, phone, email, and video. They came to the HomeTown offices physically only for lockboxes, meetings, and continuing education.

Budgeting for Change

We decided that even after the pandemic subsides, HomeTown will continue to offer a mostly remote work environment. Line by line, we looked at the budget, overhauling it to offer the best virtual options for members and staff.

When the pandemic emerged, we already had a phone system that allowed

us to forward calls to cellphones, and we invested in additional tech tools that would allow staff to operate effectively in a remote environment. We upgraded cellphones and laptops, bought Wi-Fi hotspots to make distance work possible from nearly any location, and signed up for a professional Zoom subscription. We informed members about going virtual and new methods of participation; most embraced the changes and continue to favor them today.

Our philosophy is to bring every member the services they need, wherever they are.

Virtual platforms are inexpensive to access, and that worked in our favor. We now offer education entirely on a virtual platform, and members prefer to take advantage of these offerings from the comfort and safety of their own homes and offices. We provide all virtual meetings and education at no additional cost to members, except for certain professional designation courses. Business partners are happy to sponsor trainings and recommend guest speakers.

The 'Now Normal'

HomeTown's website is now a one-stop virtual dashboard for all member

needs. Members can send a message through the website to make a virtual appointment or reach staff 24/7. New member onboarding and account updates are also 100% virtual and processed within hours.

We make communications clear and concise—often short enough to be above "the fold" of a single screen. And what did we do with the last remaining service that requires in-person interaction? We now offer lockbox pickup and delivery, and members think that's pretty cool.

Socialization is still important, of course, and solid, trusting relationships help people work better together. So we offer live networking events to those who want them and virtual forums for those who don't. Our philosophy is to bring every member the services they need, wherever they are.

The association staff can also work from anywhere, and that allows us to leverage remote staff. Travel expenses have dropped, and we invest more money in professional development for the staff and enhanced member benefits.

We think that HomeTown's 100% virtual environment—well, 100% with the occasional in-person option—has improved the member experience. Our association thrives in the "now normal," and we look forward to servicing our members' evolving needs. ■



Heather Wiedrich, RCE, E-PRO, C2EX, is association executive at HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in Sycamore and Sterling, Ill.

Security Smarts

Keep the personal information your association collects safe with a data security plan.

Data privacy is a hot topic today, and security breaches often make headlines. Associations often collect and maintain personally identifiable information (PII) such as Social Security numbers, health information, and credit card information. Any organization that stores and maintains PII should develop and implement a comprehensive data security policy addressing how the business collects, shares, protects, and destroys that information.

Defining PII

State laws define PII in different ways, though most state laws provide that an individual's first name or initial and last name, when held in conjunction with one or more of the following items of information, constitutes PII:

- Social Security number
- Driver's license or state ID card number
- Financial account, credit card, or debit card number in combination with a security code, access code, or password that permits access to the individual's account

Some state law definitions are broader, however. For example, the California Consumer Privacy Act broadly defines "personal information" as "information that identifies, relates to, describes, is reasonably capable of being associated with, or could reasonably be linked, directly or indirectly, with a particular consumer or household."

This covers a person's real name, address, email address, Social Security number, driver's license or state ID, biometric information, credit card and bank account information, medical information, and even internet activity such as a browser history. Confirming how the laws applicable to your association define PII

will help you get a handle on what PII you have in your association data.

Which Laws Are Applicable?

A familiarity with the data security and privacy laws applicable to the REALTOR® association is key to drafting a legally compliant data security policy. While federal data security requirements are not applicable to associations, all 50 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted security breach notification laws, and many states have enacted laws governing the disposal of PII.

Three states—California, Colorado, and Virginia—have passed comprehensive data privacy legislation, which provides consumers with a set of rights related to their PII. Keep in mind that many state data security and privacy laws apply to any business that does business with, or maintains the PII of, that state's residents. If your association does business with or maintains PII for out-of-state residents, it may be subject to those states' laws in addition to those of its home state.

Your Data Security Policy

Once your association is familiar with the applicable data security laws, the next step is to create a legally compliant data security policy. The Federal Trade Commission recommends the following five key principles in building a policy:

- 1. Take stock.** Audit what types of PII your organization maintains and why, who has access to PII, how PII is collected, and how PII is disposed.
- 2. Scale down.** Don't collect unnecessary PII, and only keep PII for as long as is necessary.
- 3. Lock it.** Establish a protection plan for any PII the association collects, includ-

ing physical and electronic security. Investigate the security practices of any third-party vendors with which the association engages.

- 4. Pitch it.** Develop a document retention policy that provides for proper disposal of collected PII. Simply deleting files from a computer is usually not enough to make a file inaccessible or irretrievable.
- 5. Plan ahead.** Develop a policy that addresses what to do in the event of a security breach. Remember that your association's security breach policy must comply with the state laws to which it is subject.

Data Privacy and COVID-19

With limited exceptions, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to keep all employee medical information confidential, including an employee's diagnosis or treatment, whether an employee is on leave due to COVID-19, and an employee's vaccination status. All confidential medical information should be stored separately from an employee's personnel file. Some states offer guidance about maintaining employee vaccination records, so check with your state authorities for further guidance.

Be sure to check out NAR's Data Privacy Toolkit at nar.realtor/data-security-toolkit. It features numerous resources, including checklists, a sample written data security program, best practices for drafting a data security breach notification, and model privacy policies. ■



Chloe Hecht is the National Association of REALTORS® senior counsel. You can reach her at checht@nar.realtor.

High Anxiety

The pandemic has affected mental health, leading many staff to reevaluate their roles within your office culture.

"Many of my staff members are experiencing more stress and anxiety now than when the pandemic started. I'm not sure how to handle this. What do I do?"

These are difficult times, and it's not surprising that many employees are experiencing significantly higher levels of stress than they did prior to the pandemic. In addition to—or in response to—higher levels of anxiety, many people are reevaluating their priorities, and this includes their employment.

The Society for Human Resource Management has given the term "Turnover Tsunami" to the phenomenon organizations are seeing with staff resignations. New candidates are asking whether positions can be performed fully remote, and if they can't, they are no longer interested. Staff are saying they want more input in their jobs and decision-making, business casual or casual office attire, and more flexible hours.

Keeping Staff Happy

The first response to any current staff member experiencing increased levels of anxiety should be to respond with empathy. Everyone is different; we all respond to stress and anxiety differently. We can't expect people to respond the way we want; we can only expect them to respond as who they are.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended in 2009, anxiety and other mental and/or emotional health issues can be considered a disability if they limit one or more life functions. This might include an inability to sleep, a lack of concentration, a fear of interacting with the public, and other limitations.



Use your active-listening skills to hear what your staff is saying and demonstrate understanding.

If your association is covered under the ADA and an employee mentions suffering from anxiety or depression, suggest that the employee seek professional attention. The employee might need to go on short-term disability or make use of another accommodation.

Under the ADA, it is not legally necessary to produce medical documentation to consider someone disabled. If someone can perceive a disability, the law provides that we respond as if there is a disability. In the event there is such a situation in your association, be sure to reach out to an employment lawyer or an HR professional to discuss how to respond appropriately.

Accommodating Change

For staff looking for additional input, a more casual culture, or business casual attire, keep an open mind to their input and assess whether it makes sense to adjust. Any of these perks can boost staff morale and productivity. Ask yourself: Is it really necessary to require full business attire?

Does the association have positions that lend themselves to remote work? If your workforce has demonstrated they can get the work done remotely, consider it.

AEs set the tone for their staff. You may be experiencing your own challenges, but it's up to you lead, and that means adapting to the times. Use your active-listening skills to hear what your staff is saying and demonstrate understanding. Challenge yourself to look at things in a new way, and don't stay with the status quo because it has worked in the past or you are uncomfortable with change. You can't expect more from your staff than you give.

Do you have an HR question? Send it to Carole Kaptur confidentially at ckaptur@nar.realtor. ■



Carole Kaptur, SHRM-SCP, HCS, GRI, C2EX, is a consultant in NAR's Strategic Association Management Services, Talent Development, and Resources group.

Start With Self-Care

Create a culture in which staff members understand and respect each other.

For too long, we as executives have done whatever it takes to convince our colleagues that we are the ultimate professionals—confident, unwavering, and perfect. In the business world, we can be anything that we want to be, just as long as we are not ordinary, flawed human beings. In reality, no one is perfect, and nothing speaks to a person's character like vulnerability.

Statistically speaking, if there are five or more people on your staff, at least one of them has at some point struggled with mental illness. Perhaps you have no idea who it is—or perhaps that person is you.

I've worked in REALTOR® associations for seven years, and I like to think the work I've done so far has positioned me as an industry leader. But I did it all while struggling with anxiety and depression. I've made plenty of mistakes, but every struggle has made me stronger.

Nowadays, I focus on not only making things easier for myself but also helping others who are traveling a similar path, and I ask all AEs to consider that an association culture of self-care and well-being starts with you. Create and nurture an office environment that's built on respect for each individual's journey and needs. Show your staff that it's OK to not always be OK.

Talk about mental health and self-care. I rave to my colleagues about the tools I use such as the Insight Timer meditation app and Fidgetland discreet fidget toys. I tell them about the books that have changed my life, such as *The 5 Second Rule* by Mel Robbins and *You Are a Badass* by Jen Sincero. My colleagues know I have a regular counseling appointment. I'm not shouting it from the rooftops, but I'm also not hiding it, because I'm not ashamed—not anymore.



Talk about mental health and self-care. Show your staff that it's OK to not always be OK.

Introduce small staff initiatives that are rooted in self-care. An office walking challenge, for example, encourages staff members to walk around the building for at least 10 minutes each day. Host quarterly or biannual staff potlucks, where everyone makes a favorite dish and brings it to share.

Staff Cohesion

In addition to promoting self-care, association executives should create and nurture a cohesive team environment. Have weekly staff meetings where everyone talks about their ongoing projects. Not only will this provide the opportunity for staff to support each other, but it will also allow you to monitor their work to ensure no one is overloaded.

I launched an ongoing activity called "Duckies for Good Deeds." I ordered about 50 rubber ducks from Amazon and distributed them to the staff with notecards. Whenever one of

their colleagues does something—big or small—that deserves recognition, staffers can leave a rubber duck and a note on that person's desk to say thank you. We have only one rule to enhance the element of surprise: You can't get caught leaving a rubber duckie.

Also consider budgeting for at least one staff training day annually that includes team-building exercises, an internal review of the association's strategic plan, and activities that allow staff to learn new things about each other. Staff members should respect each other, and respect grows from understanding. As much as it is appropriate, allow them to see each other as human beings with the same core goal: to live a happy, fulfilling life.

If you create an environment in which all staff members are truly seen, heard, and respected, your association will reap the rewards with increased efficiency and less turnover. So, be a caring AE—just be sure to start with yourself and your staff. ■



Sarah Rayne, RCE, AHWD, E-PRO, C2EX, is director of operations at the Howard County (Maryland) Association of REALTORS®.

Managing the Entrepreneurial Member

REALTORS® require a deft touch from first point of contact.

As a REALTOR® association executive, you're working with an entrepreneurial membership. An entrepreneur, as one dictionary defines the term, is a person who organizes a business or businesses, taking on greater-than-normal financial risks in order to do so.

While some brokers and agents may not consider themselves entrepreneurial, the successful ones certainly do. Those are the members you'll likely interact with regularly—or wish you did. So, figuring out how to work with entrepreneurs is critical, whether you work at the local, state, or national level.

Throughout my 47-year career as a real estate professional and AE, knowing and working among successful entrepreneurs has been a privilege and a challenge. Some were successful brokers, others were mega-producing agents, and some were successful in fields other than real estate. And although they came from diverse backgrounds, they had one common trait: They required management but hated being managed.

Information on Demand

For entrepreneurs, the workday doesn't start at 9 a.m. or end at 5 p.m. There is no lunch hour or five-day workweek. There is no inbox where they can leave things until tomorrow. Nor is there an outbox that assures they get paid at the end of the week. In many cases, they are unfamiliar with such a structured environment.

Their environment is best summed up as "information on demand." If they are dealing with a client or customer, they know that person expects them to pick

up the phone or respond to an email or text immediately. Consumers today don't want to go through a series of prompts, be placed on hold, or leave a voicemail message. If they do leave a message, they don't expect to wait hours for a callback.

By the time their agent or broker gets back to them, the alligator they were wrestling has only gotten larger, or they have moved on to someone or something else. Agents and brokers know this because National Association of REALTORS® designation classes teach and preach the importance of real-time, live responsiveness. We also know this is true because we're all consumers ourselves, and we all hate the lack of customer service that seems to be the corporate norm today.

Treat your members as you would want to be treated.

With that in mind, what kind of service do you want to give to the entrepreneurs you serve? Start with that thing we call the Golden Rule: Treat your members as you would want to be treated. Here are some ideas that may help:

1. Members don't think you are the most important employee the association has. Odds are, most members will rarely talk to you. Instead, whoever answers the phone or responds to texts and emails is the first point of contact and the person they talk to most frequently.
2. If No. 1 is true, be sure the person or people answering the phone know that

their most important job is to answer the phone. Unless they are doing something time-sensitive, stopping to answer the phone is more important.

3. Develop a workload matrix that tells you when you need to hire more staff or cut back hours. This will likely be different for every association, but the one we use results in about four hours and 15 minutes of staff time per member, per year. Below that, members' needs are on hold too long or go without a reply for days. More, and staff are playing solitaire on their computers.
4. Associations don't have to be available every hour of every day. Setting the expectation for your hours of operation and ensuring that someone is available to assist your members during normal business hours is all that's needed.

A candidate for NAR office once asked me, "How is your association different from all the others?" My response: "There are nine local associations in our metro area. We do not operate an MLS, we do not have the lowest dues, and we are by far not the largest, so we focus on the member experience."

The answer produced a puzzled look. "What does that mean?"

Again, my answer was simple. "When a member calls the board office, it's not because we are going to make them any money—odds are that the opposite is likely true. When they contact our office, it is because they have an immediate problem or a question that requires information. After they hang up the phone, we want them to say, 'I'm glad I called. If

I'd known they were that helpful, I'd have called them first. Next time, I will."

Managing entrepreneurs, however, isn't only about understanding their timely need for information. Entrepreneurs tend to be self-confident, so when decisions are being made, suggesting that members don't know what they don't know can be dangerous.

Instead, foster discussion by asking probing questions to which the answers are not immediately obvious. It may open them to new ideas and allow them to learn more about something they thought they knew without challenging them. It may also help them formulate how to make the much-needed decision that prompted their call.

Elected Entrepreneurs

When members get involved in governance, they bring the same personality traits they use in dealing with the public. To avoid losing control of meetings, preparation is critical.

1. Send an agenda to those attending the meeting a week in advance. How the agenda is developed should include input from your chair and others on the committee. Do not, however, allow them to develop the agenda without your input or guidance unless they can recite your strategic plan from memory. This is how committees turn horses into camels.
2. All support documents needed for the meeting should accompany the agenda unless something is confidential. The larger you make the elephant, the less chance of someone asking for more information. Only after all of the information is in front of the entrepreneur can you reduce the job to bite-sized pieces.

3. If a decision is required, limit the options to at least two but no more than three. Too many options can stymie decision-making with analysis paralysis. Supply only one option, and the entrepreneur will feel managed and ask, "But what about this?"

While entrepreneurs tend to be easy-going, they also are deeply passionate. This can result in easy conversations taking heated twists. If you want to establish long-term, positive relationships with members, master the ability to deescalate. A collegial and adaptive leadership style helps.

Helping entrepreneurial members see the association as a valuable resource is an essential skill for an AE. Successful entrepreneurs know their own value proposition and can articulate it easily. Don't be surprised if they expect you and your association to do the same. ■



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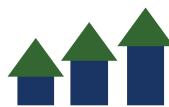


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Good Governance

Virginia REALTORS® CEO brings passion to structure, advocacy roles.

In November, Virginia REALTORS® CEO Terrie Suit completed three years' work as vice chair of the National Association of REALTORS® Governance Game Changer Presidential Advisory Group. The group ushered in a realignment that promises to make NAR a more focused, nimble organization.

Suit is uniquely qualified to lead on governance issues. In addition to spending more than 35 years in the real estate business—as a REALTOR®, mortgage loan officer, and association executive—she served four terms as a representative in the Virginia House of Delegates. While in office, she helped create the Virginia Fair Housing Office and Fair Housing Board, and she chaired the Virginia Housing Commission.

A tireless proponent of veteran homeownership, she went on to serve as the state's first Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security. And in 2020, she was named to *Virginia Business*' inaugural Virginia 500 Power List of influential business leaders. REALTOR® AE asked Suit about the impact of NAR's realignment and the issues most important to her.

Q: Why did NAR overhaul its governance structure when it did?

Suit: The existing structure had been in place for nearly 100 years. [NAR 2018] President [Elizabeth] Mendenhall believed it was time to review the structure, and the leadership team supported her initiative. The team wanted a thorough, well-researched review with input from all constituents of the REALTOR® family.

Q: What advantages does the realignment offer to state and local association executives?

Suit: It separates the state and large local director formula so that one is not taking



Safe, affordable housing, investment in commercial real estate, ensuring small businesses can thrive—these are issues that resonate across party lines.

—Terrie Suit

directors from the other. It also adds seats for small and medium-sized associations. This ensures that all perspectives are represented and reduces a source of friction. I was over-the-top ecstatic about the outcome.

Q: What attracted you to government service?

Suit: As a mortgage lender, I was an affiliate member of my local REALTOR® association, and I enjoyed advocacy. In the state legislature, I had the opportunity to [sponsor] many bills that were part of the

REALTOR® association legislative agenda. It became a passion for me.

Q: How did your role in veterans' issues translate to real estate?

Suit: I was a huge supporter of military family issues, being a family member myself. So many military families don't have the opportunity to buy a home and grow roots in a community because they transfer duty stations frequently. I became a VA loan specialist as a mortgage lender and worked with military installations to educate service members and veterans on the personal and investment benefits of owning a home.

Q: What's one thing every association executive can do to advance fair housing?

Suit: Make fair housing training relatable. Bring in great storytellers who have real-life examples to share, so that members can better understand what discriminatory practices are and why they are still a problem today. Talk about it frequently—not just at CE time.

Q: What have you learned about advocacy in more than 20 years on the front lines?

Suit: The most successful government affairs professionals have well-cultivated, long-term relationships with policymakers [that are] built through an investment of time.

Relationships with policymakers on all sides of the aisle are critical. REALTOR® issues are not partisan. Safe, affordable housing, investment in commercial real estate, ensuring small businesses can thrive—these are issues that resonate across party lines. ■

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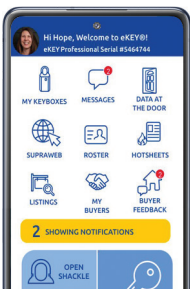
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