

Shared VALUE

Double Your Value Without Increasing Your Budget

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Shared Services Toolkit & Workshop

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

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