



The
REAL VALUE of
ASSOCIATION
MEMBERSHIP

We asked NAR members to tell us what benefits them most about their association membership—and what we can do better.

BY LIISA ANDREASSEN

In today's dynamic real estate market, staying ahead of the curve is a necessity. For real estate professionals looking to enhance their knowledge, network and professional stature, joining a professional association can be a strategic investment.



But that's only true if the association remains responsive to members' ever-changing needs. "Consistent and routine inquiries to the members must be a part of the association's culture," says **Anne Marie Matteo, RCE, CAE**, president and CEO, Tri-County Suburban REALTORS® in Malvern, Pa. "Their input is vital to ensure meaningful value is delivered."

We asked several National Association of REALTORS® members and association executives to give us their take on what benefits members most value.

What's Working?

Networking



When it comes to the value of membership, networking tops the list for **Paul Bullington, ABR, CRB**, principal broker and property manager in Dickson, Tenn., and a member of Greater Nashville REALTORS®. He often networks with fellow professionals across the nation to exchange experiences, insights and expertise amid various market conditions, he says, primarily through affiliated institutes and societies, including the Real Estate Business Institute, the Institute of Real Estate Management, and the Real Estate Buyer's Agent Council. "I credit NAR with building the foundations for these things to exist," he says. "Given the inherently solitary nature of the real estate profession, fostering connections offline and online with like-minded entrepreneurs has proven invaluable."



Beverly Pindling, GRI, PMN, agrees. She's an award-winning real estate professional in the greater Orlando, Fla., area and has been a member of Florida Realtors® for 40 years. As a Florida-licensed instructor for 30 years, she values the opportunity to encourage and inspire other members. "NAR empowers me to positively influence the next generation of real estate professionals," she says.

Advocacy



For **Michael Maerten, 2024** chairman of the board of Tri-County Suburban REALTORS® (Pa.), the high-level advocacy efforts at national, state and local levels are key. On a wide range of topics, from extending the National Flood Insurance Program to preserving 1031 like-kind exchanges to protecting independent contractor status for agents, the association's advocacy benefits not just all members but property owners and tenants, too.



Carlos Alleyne, ABR, CIPS, a luxury real estate agent and secretary of Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie REALTORS® (Fla.), places high value on opportunities to advocate personally as a member of NAR and encourages others to feel empowered to share their voices.

"Serving as an NAR director and being an RPAC Platinum Hall of Fame recipient gives you a heightened sense of shaping policies and regulations that affect the real estate profession," he says. "The average member does not always see the efforts that NAR employs to advocate for its members' interests at local, state and national levels."

Education



Zack Wahlquist, RCE, CAE, chief operating officer at the Chicago Association of REALTORS®, agrees that advocacy is an essential and valued service, but at the individual member level, he believes education tops the benefits list.

"From licensing and continuing education to successful business practices and industry and legal updates—all these are critical to member success," Wahlquist says. "And associations are uniquely positioned to be that source of information at every stage of a member's real estate journey."

The educational resources available through NAR are "exceptional," says Bullington. He appreciates how NAR continually provides relevant resources, such as "Right Tools Right Now" and designations and certifications to enhance members' value from initial client contact to contract.

"I firmly believe NAR's real estate-specific education stands out as the most comprehensive and accessible option for agents striving for career success," Bullington says. "The depth and relevance of the content offered by NAR have played a pivotal role in shaping my professional journey and bolstering my ability to excel in this competitive industry."

He also finds top value in designations and certifications. "The credentials show clients and peers that we have additional industry-specific training and a dedication to honing skills."

Alleyne, who is a member of NAR's Global Business and Alliances Committee, says earning his Certified International Property Specialist designation helped him transform his business. He has become an expert in identifying buyers from various countries who are interested in U.S. buying opportunities, he says. Alleyne implemented a targeted strategy to establish his expertise, curating a portfolio of international

Find Your Member Value

NAR's Value Proposition Toolkit can help you highlight why real estate professionals should join your association. It covers everything from how to get members involved to how to communicate your value proposition once it's set. The process starts with a simple questionnaire that walks through:

- What products and services you offer
- Your target audience(s)
- The problems you solve for members
- What differentiates you from other associations, brokerages, vendors, and so on

Access the toolkit now at nar.realtor/ae/value-proposition-toolkit.

clients, which produced seven-figure sales. "I attracted more qualified referrals, ultimately leading to a quicker sale at a higher price point," he says.

The most rewarding part of becoming a CIPS designee, he says, has been his ability to share this newfound knowledge with global committee members at several local associations in his state—REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties, Emerald Coast Association of REALTORS®, Central Panhandle Association of REALTORS® and Pinellas REALTOR® Organization—which in turn empowered them to build global programs within their associations.



As a past NAR board member and executive committee member, **Christopher Tenggren, CRB, CRS**—a managing broker based in Rochelle, Ill., and a member of HomeTown Association of REALTORS®—regularly gleans key insights from NAR through its website, blogs, REALTOR® magazine and its social media. "I try to participate wherever and whenever I can and value my association insights, especially in these times when the landscape is shifting," he says. "Weekly and daily updates and insights make a difference

in my ability to train my agents and answer their questions."

Local associations are a great source for insights into local market conditions, as well as legislative and regulatory news, Alleynes says. His association runs a live panel event called Legal Lane Live, which features six 20-minute speed rounds with subject matter experts from the Broward County Attorney's Real Estate Council. These are scheduled on an as-needed basis related to current issues. To date, it's held five. "It has sold out to capacity on every occasion," he says.

The Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie association also just rolled out "A Broker's Path to Success"—a guide to best practices that centers around changing market conditions. Another program he appreciates is Community 101, where mayors, city commissioners, state representatives, property appraisers and chamber presidents update members on the legislative landscape.

With members working toward practice changes resulting from the NAR proposed settlement, Tri-County Suburban has expanded its training series, Matteo says. "Specifically, we are hosting a program entitled, 'Navigating Change: An Action Plan to Preparing for the NAR Settlement Agreement.'

Now more than ever, we recognize a REALTOR®'s value proposition must be communicated on a clear and consistent basis," she says.

"Open and candid conversations with buyers and sellers need to take place early and often in the relationship. To assist our members, we assembled a panel of experienced REALTORS® to present what members can do now to prepare for the changes to come."

Free or Low-Cost Services



"Historically, members have told us that they find the most value in the free and low-cost education provided, so we're working to offer more and new educational opportunities," says **Sarah Rayne, RCE, CAE**, CEO, Howard County Association of REALTORS® in Maryland.

For example, HCAR is hosting a free, in-person Accredited Buyers Representative class; it's using an NAR Smart Growth Grant to offer the national association's new Planning & Zoning Certificate Course; and it recently used an NAR DEI Grant to offer the At Home With Diversity certification.

Maerten says he values his association's educational "season passes,"

Designations Add Clout

Before Chicago's Zack Wahlquist became a COO, he was the director of education for a small higher education association. As he moved up in his career, earning both a CAE and RCE, those designations gave him the opportunity to learn about associations more broadly, including advocacy, governance, and financial rules and regulations—things he hadn't been exposed to before in his career. But he says the greatest value has been in helping him think outside of traditional boxes so he can better support members.

"There is national law. There is state law. There are the state's real estate governing entities. There is the NAR Code of Ethics. Because there are so many levels and layers to what governs us, it is natural to feel constricted," he says. "Going through the designation process has helped me see the world outside of the real estate lens.

As an example, we had a remote policy in place before we experienced lockdowns related to COVID-19, largely because of the experiences I had through the designation process and in working with other industries. This allowed us to seamlessly support our members during that essential early time of the pandemic. It also allowed us to move more quickly to online learning models and create new learning opportunities."

Howard County Association of REALTORS® Rayne earned her RCE and CAE before she became a CEO. "To pass these exams, you must be deeply knowledgeable in association governance, executive leadership, organizational strategy, operations, business development, member engagement, and marketing and communications," she says. "I lean on this knowledge and experience to make decisions every day."

which enable members to attend various educational offerings for one fee. Through an online school partnership with The CE Shop and through his local association's own hybrid and virtual classes, members have access to a wide range of virtual options for earning continuing education credits.

Plus, valuable technology tools include access to zipForm and zipForm Mobile real estate form software; DocuSign; Forewarn for customer identity verification; and a tech support hotline. Other NAR member benefits that fly under the radar, he says, include the audio library Libby and discounts through the GE Appliance Store; he uses both often.

Promoting Their Value

Also highly valued by members is customer-facing marketing showcasing the value of working with a real estate professional who is a REALTOR®.

Bullington finds the national "That's Who We R" consumer ad campaign to be very helpful with its downloadable social media graphics and online assets. "Encouraging agents to integrate these materials into their marketing strategies could yield significant benefits," he says.

State and local associations and affiliates can easily leverage and locally personalize the national campaign assets in various ways, including the NAR+ Photofy app (photofy.com/NAR), which allows AEs to create custom-branded galleries, templates and ready-to-share content. Alleyne's association has a targeted "Only a REALTOR®" campaign, with spots on television, the internet and streaming services, to reach the communities and neighborhoods its members serve. "It tells our story and shows the importance of working with an agent who is a REALTOR® while giving the profession a favorable impression," he says.

HomeTown Association of REALTORS® has been repurposing materials from NAR's website to promote REALTORS® as champions of the consumer. Twice each week throughout 2024, the association is dripping out NAR's buyer-focused "105 Reasons Why REALTORS® Are Worth Every

Penny of Their Compensation" on facebook.com/HometownRealtors.

Bullington adds that he makes the most of REALTOR® safety training, partnerships and tools for marketing, and association-branded merchandise.

Continuous Improvement Is a Must

We asked the members interviewed for this article to talk about what they'd like to see more or less of from their association. Their responses:

- On a regular basis, evaluate individual programs for relevance.
- Reinforce their efforts to communicate the value of working with a REALTOR®, a member of NAR.
- Use member outreach efforts to show that association leadership is paying attention to the individual perspective of members.

On the latter point, in 2024 alone, as of June 15, Leadership Team members had made more than 70 in-person and virtual appearances. That's on top of the outreach conducted by the association's 13 regional vice presidents. NAR is also communicating directly with members through Kevin Sears' videos from the road, as well as sharing important information through mobile app notifications, email updates and quarterly magazines. And through a new grassroots communication program, NAR is helping individual members act as "surrogates," spreading the word about REALTOR® value. (Email surrogates@nar.realtor for more information.)

Even with all that, says Bullington, "it would be great to see more member outreach on the part of NAR. Our local associations are good at creating that sense of community and everyone knows everyone, but most members don't know anyone at NAR. When we can put a face to a name, that helps to foster loyalty, understanding and support."

Rayne places a deliberate emphasis on open and regular communication with brokers. "I plan to pop into every single office in my association to drop off membership value materials and to generally check in," she says. "I want them to see me, as a representative of

Members Share Reasons to Join

"Our national association provides me with a sense of security. NAR works diligently behind the scenes to safeguard my profession, protect the rights of my family and friends to homeownership, and furnish resources to enhance my professional capabilities."

—Paul Bullington, broker, REALTOR®, Realty Executives Hometown Living

"We are guided by unerring discipline, the Code of Ethics. We represent the crème de la crème of real estate licensees in this industry."

—Beverly Pindling, state licensed real estate instructor and Florida Realtors® member

"The totality of the resources we have access to is so diverse at the national, state and local levels. And being part of a larger collective—there's strength in numbers, and we're currently 1.5 million members strong."

—Michael Maerten, REALTOR®, Keller Williams Real Estate – Blue Bell

"We need to reinvest in ourselves, our education and our profession. We must stay prepared to know as much as our clients do."

—Christopher Tenggren, managing broker/designated REALTOR®, Weichert REALTORS® – Signature Professionals

the association, and know that we are here for them, and we are listening."

Creating member value, after all, should be at the forefront of every decision that an association executive makes, she adds.

"Not only do we have to demonstrate individual member value, we also have to communicate how our existence benefits our industry as a whole," Rayne says. "We must create a space so valuable that licensees look forward to renewing their membership." ●

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