

BEST OF BREED: MAKING YOUR CHAPTER STAND OUT

The U.S. Alumni Association Other Chapter Trustee Selection Committee (the Committee) conducted a survey of the chapters at the end of 2019 in order to produce an updated report on best practices of engaged chapters. Previous reports were given in 2016 and 2017. The Committee sent emails to all chapters asking them to review their chapters' activities. They were asked to describe three activities that were most successful in gaining and engaging their area alumni. Thirteen of the 101 chapters responded. It is notable that all of the chapters that have been designated Distinguished Chapters in the past responded to the survey questions.

A preliminary observation is that the chapters represent diverse geographic and demographic circumstances. The implication of this obvious fact is that each chapter needs to adapt its activities to account for such factors as size of the chapter's territory and the physical separation of members (membership density), age range of the alumni population in the area, the frequency of Naval Academy events within the territory and the resources available within the territory.

For instance, the Oregon & Southwest Washington Chapter encompasses the entire state of Oregon and a large portion of Southwest Washington but has a low membership density. An example of efforts to accommodate geographically separated alumni is the scheduling of simultaneous Army-Navy Game watch events in venues located in Southwest Washington, the Portland area, Central Oregon and Southern Oregon.

Jacksonville, FL, is by land mass the largest city in the U.S., which requires extensive planning and multiple venues in order to get members engaged. Jacksonville does have a high membership density but still has geographic constraints to overcome for member engagement. The chapter has a major professional football team in its area and was able to leverage that resource to use the stadium Jumbotron for the Chapter's Army-Navy game watch event this past year.

By comparison, the NC Triangle Area (a multi-county metro area including four population centers) is a medium-sized area by land mass, yet it has a much smaller membership density. With aggressive outreach and integration from alternative sources (NROTC units, local veterans' organizations, etc.), they have been able to generate significant interest from area alumni, USNA parents and others. This has developed an increase in their membership, participation and excitement over the past few years.

The Committee has provided an abridged summary of the engagement practices that were mined from the chapter responses. They represent the most mentioned practices within each category with one or more representative example(s) of several practices. A more complete compilation of the responses will be provided to the Chapter Presidents and Secretaries. The Committee has classified the engagement practices into **five** categories: 1. Leadership and

Chapter Communications; 2. Chapter Member Activities; 3. Engagement with the Wider Alumni Association; 4. Engagement with the Blue and Gold Officers and Parent Clubs; 5. Engagement with Other Veteran Organizations, Service Academy Alumni Organizations and the Local Community. Not unexpectedly, there is some overlap among these broad categories.

1. Leadership and Chapter Communications

- A. Strong elected Chapter Officers and Board Members: The President, Officers and Board Members must be fully engaged, aggressive and passionate about the Chapter and the Naval Academy. Without these traits the Chapter will limp along with very few staying engaged and/or getting involved.
- B. The primary means of communication mentioned by the chapters were electronic:
 - 1) Chapter Websites
 - 2) Social Media; LinkedIn group pages and Facebook pages
 - 3) Email; Immediate welcome aboard when someone signs up online.
 - 4) Telephone; Can't reach someone via email, try the phone.
- C. Interestingly, there was not much mention of the use of physical mail.
- D. Examples of the use of the communications methods are:
 - 1) The president of the Columbus, OH, Chapter is in the process of contacting ALL alumni in the local area. As of the submission of the survey response, the president had reached about 60 percent of the alumni within 50 miles of Columbus and had up-to-date information on 95 additional interested alumni.
 - 2) The Quantico Chapter uses all of the mentioned electronic communications, including Chapter websites, LinkedIn group pages and Facebook pages as well as All Hands Chapter emails through the usna.com site.
 - 3) The Jacksonville Chapter alternates their monthly on-site board meetings with meetings via Skype to maximize attendance opportunities.

2. Chapter Member Activities

- A. Football watch parties (multiple sites for all, especially Army-Navy)
- B. Aggressive membership drives with some ideas such as
 - 1) Decade/class representatives
 - 2) Multiple year signups
 - 3) Active duty discounts
- C. Long range planning (annual schedule of events planned early in the year)
- D. All age events, such as:
 - 1) Minor League and Major League Baseball games (maybe even a tailgater)
 - 2) Charity work
 - 3) Races
 - 4) Picnics
- E. Breakfasts, Luncheons, and Happy Hours with dynamic speakers and networking discussions

- F. Honor lost alumni from the area (Note: local veterans groups may already have a program to tie in with)
- G. Some specific examples of member activities in the survey responses are:
 - 1) The Pensacola Chapter has established a USNA Walk of Honor at the Pensacola Veterans Memorial Park. Any alumni born, raised or passed away in Pensacola may be memorialized with a brick in a special section of the walkway.
 - 2) Because of its location, the San Diego Chapter is able to get a variety of speakers at meetings, such as active duty and retired admirals, radio talk show hosts, and elected officials. Use your area for whatever it has to bring to the table.
 - 3) The Oregon and Southwest Washington Chapter has begun to hold its August picnic in Washougal, WA (25 miles from Portland, OR), which has resulted in increased attendance by members in Southwest Washington who normally have trouble making it to the monthly luncheons in Portland. (Note: The 2020 Picnic will be a joint operation with the Portland West Point graduates.)

3. Engagement with the Wider Alumni Association

- A. Support USNA Teams and groups in the local area. (Site map on USNA.com provides chapter leaders access to sports/clubs/ECAs travel schedule)
- B. Initiatives to support NASS/STEM programs (also relates to engagement with the Blue & Gold organization)
- C. Some specific examples of engagement with the wider Alumni Association are:
 - 1) The Knoxville-Oak Ridge Chapter has become very involved with the USNA Lightweight Crew team during their spring practice each year on the Clinch River, recruiting more than 30 local host families for team members. For some of the families, hosting the midshipmen is their first exposure to USNA.
 - 2) The Texas Gulf Coast Chapter created a foundation that sponsors various types of local community support focused on STEM. This introduces USNA to area families and includes providing scholarships to STEM camp. (Note: this relates to community engagement and interaction with the Blue & Gold organization.)

4. Engagement with the Blue and Gold Organization and Parent Clubs

- A. Involvement in Plebe Class send-offs and related events.
- B. Encouraging Parent Club Officers and members to attend chapter events.
 - 1) Designate one of the board members to be the Parent Club Liaison for the chapter
- C. Interact with, and encourage chapter members to become, Blue and Gold Officers.

5. Engagement with other Veteran Organizations, Service Academy Organizations and the Local Community

- A. Integrate and interact with other service academy alumni groups.
- B. Integrate with community veterans organizations.
- C. Work with local ROTC units in the area.
- D. Interact with the local Chamber of Commerce.
- E. Integrate with community Veterans Associations (this overlaps with the previous category, but such organizations are both veterans' organizations and civic organizations).

Examples of these engagements are:

- 1) The North Carolina Triangle Chapter has leveraged the proximity of three strong NROTC units within a 10-mile radius to assist in a growth of active chapter membership from 25 to 165.
- 2) The Shenandoah Valley Chapter has essentially joined forces with and closely integrated with the West Point Association of Graduates Northern Shenandoah Valley. The chapter found that this was the single most successful boost in participation.

The Jacksonville Chapter's Army-Navy watch party at Jaguar Stadium was more than a USNA-USMA event. It involved the local Chamber of Commerce, local sponsors and about 1,000 attendees, with proceeds of the watch party going to support local veterans organizations.

As a final note, all chapters, regardless of size and present engagement profiles, are encouraged by the Committee to participate in the annual International Chapter Officers Forum (ICOF), submit your accomplishments for the Distinguished Chapter Award and the "OTHER Chapter Trustee" position during the June-July 2020 timeframe. Contact the Alumni Association staff if you need any assistance in any of these or other areas of chapter activities.