NEW MEMBERSHIP MODELS AND ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS
How current options reinforce association fundamentals

Joel Fischer

Structural changes in associations are brought about either reactively (threats to status quo) or proactively (new goals and planning, new opportunities). An examination of recent experiences of associations adopting new membership models provides us with examples from both camps: associations who have had to change in order to adapt to altered environments and associations that have seen new opportunities for growth (members, services, relevance).

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In evaluating and planning these changes the associations have questioned and reaffirmed the fundamental principles of their organisations. As McSean & Jakobsson put it: "*Member organisations, of their very nature, tend to be hard to manage and even harder to transform into the kind of nimble, radical, open organisations that are needed to cope with a professional and work environment of continuous, rapid and fundamental change.*"

RADICAL OVERHAUL
The **European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL)** operated for 15 years as a conventional association with a permanent office and salaried staff. Around the millennium it became apparent that the trajectory of the organisation was degrading in light of changes to its operating environments (expected size of membership, accession of Eastern Europe into its operating areas, continuing radical changes to its professional environment etc). In short, the status quo was not sustainable for the coming years.

Following a careful analysis of its resources and options a fairly radical overhaul of EAHIL and its membership programme was

undertaken. Actions which were a cause for significant expense / overhead cost were outsourced, eliminated, or streamlined using online technologies. Barriers to membership were eliminated through a combination of online tools, no annual fee, and volunteer participation. EAHIL's adoption of an "Open Access" association model was a success – proven through the four years

between the statutory changes and the 2007 analysis (and beyond: EAHIL currently has 1,400 members in 30 countries). "Open Access" in this case being a play on words from scholarly publishing evolution in the internet-age, as well as pertaining to some of the new features of EAHIL's membership package.

McSean and Jakobsson are careful to point out some of the potential limitations of the EAHIL model as well as the likely factors in its successful transition: a buffer of time

and resources which allowed it to experiment with this new model and to recover had it failed; a committed Board; and active engagement from the general membership.

AMBITIOUS GOAL
In another case, **AIGA** (a professional association in graphics and design) also examined the changing milieu of its mem-

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bers' professions and opted to implement a membership model which is arranged on the participatory relationship between the individuals and the common goods that the organisation embodies (and creates). Its goal was ambitious: to double the total membership in two years. While it has not doubled its membership it has seen a 25% increase, no small victory, and the models of participation are continuing to bear fruit, thereby strengthening the value AIGA delivers to its members and its position in the design professions.

Taking the "Open Access" model more directly and literally is **CompTIA** - an association of computing and information technology professionals - which reshaped how members access the services and support CompTIA provides. In 2014 alone *"30,000 individuals will have engaged with CompTIA, complementing [its] premier membership of 2,000 organisations."* Part of the association's enhanced changes were an upgrade to its internet-delivered services which is a mission-critical environment for its networking and information sharing / publishing. As with the other associations discussed here, the restructuring has forward looking components as well which provide for strengthened relationships between CompTIA and all its partner communities.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Following a two-year research and planning process the **American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA)** instituted a new membership model and some structural changes. As a century-old national trade association AH&LA's structural updates and logo refresh are perhaps more familiar to those of us who have seen how other long-lived associations have revised and updated

their operations as industries and economic environments have matured over time. The association's retooling has given it greater capacity to leverage its expertise to the benefit of its member industries.

"*This new structure allows AH&LA to engage more hoteliers throughout the country, significantly grow our political presence, and launch focused public policy campaigns that will garner significant results for the industry.*" - Katherine Lugar, AH&LA CEO-President

All of the cases I examined showed that success was built on careful planning and that change was implemented effectively when all stakeholders (from members to governance groups) had a say and a role to play in how things developed. In some cases a modest update was needed, in the case of EAHIL a major reimagining of the organisation was undertaken which paralleled the changes to the professions it serves. The promise of the internet continues to bear fruit for associations who understand the opportunities it offers to enhance or replace traditional publication and communications.

Running through these discussions we see that the fundamentals of the associational

process and impetus remain true and relevant, as true as they were fifty years ago, a hundred years ago and a hundred and fifty years ago. The modalities of association life and action change with the times, and as such associations - as entities, as structures, as service providers - must also negotiate change. In some cases change is necessary and, as we have seen, it is beneficial for both the central institution and its members.

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Discussed in this article:
The Open Access Association? EAHIL's new model for sustainability (2009)
Tony McSean and Arne Jakobsen
Health Information and Libraries Journal, 26, 4, pp 316-321

CompTIA Expands Its Relevance in 2014...
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31 Oct 2014, CompTIA website

New Industry-Driven Model Allows Broader Member Engagement
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Introducing a New Membership Model,
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