

2009 Member Survey National Staff Analysis and Overview

National President Comments

I sincerely wish to thank all those who took the time to participate in the 2009 Membership Survey. Your opinion counts. I wish more of your fellow ROA members had taken the time to respond. It was disappointing to see only 1.2% of our members (847 respondents), engaged in the survey. Distribution to our members was both electronic and through a link widely advertised and published in our Officer magazine.

While the group of respondents was small, we have taken the candid feedback and reviewed it in depth with your national staff who formulated measured actions appropriate to the member concerns raised in the survey. We will utilize this as a basic action plan going forward.

As I promised the membership, we are posting the survey and the initiatives coming from it on ROA's website. The survey discloses ROA has taken positive steps since the last survey in 2005 to stay focused on the core mission our Congressional charter has given us, but that many members still see ROA as an entitlements or veteran's service organization versus a professional military association. I want to take this opportunity to remind you that our focus is national security. Any entitlements ROA places effort on are in the context of how they affect national security – primarily through the impact they have on recruiting and retaining a high quality force.

Our "advocacy through education" approach is clearly understood by a majority of the survey respondents. We will continue our vital work to support our members, many of whom continue to serve in harm's way.

On the subject of our national meetings, members are recognizing the need to change and adapt to the new realities. I believe this pace of change will accelerate as ROA moves further into the 21st century. Our members have more and more demands on their time and we must enable them to engage in ROA activities in ways that are consistent with their busy lives and demanding schedules.

Thank you for your input.

Executive Director's Comments

As you may recall, a part of our series of national convention contracts with Marriott was an agreement that their survey company would conduct a number of surveys for us. We have done different surveys in past years, including "magazine readership" and "external customers." This year, we wanted to do a broadly based survey of members asking for input that might help the ROA leadership assess the state of the association, and to decide on the best way ahead. We made what I thought was a strong effort to publicize the survey, including putting a "wrap" on one issue of The Officer magazine with a message from the National President encouraging participation, posting the survey on the website, making frequent announcements in the e-Blast,

and setting up computer "kiosks" at the 2009 Mid-Winter meeting.

Unfortunately, the response was not as strong as I hoped. We received only 847 responses - slightly over 1% of our membership. I am not sure that this represents a statistically significant sample, and so I have cautioned the National Staff against making any sweeping conclusions. On the positive side, however, many of those members who did respond provided very thoughtful comments.

The national staff Directors have spent considerable time reviewing the results, and reading the "verbatim" responses. The summaries of their analyses are attached to this message, as are the survey questions themselves, the verbatim responses, and the Marriott Corporation briefing slides from their report of the survey results.

I trust you will find the attachments interesting, and they may well provide you some guidance for the future. However, I caution again that the number of respondents was extremely small.

Member Services

The dynamic tension identified in the Focus Groups conducted at our 2008 Atlanta Convention between our retired, retired awaiting pay and serving members is evident in the survey participant's comments. Although the survey discloses that the participants understand ROA's mission as given in its Congressional charter, their comments suggest that that we need to continuously emphasize our obligation to that mission. Our target demographic has to be the serving officer, for as Past National President Paul Groskreutz reminded us, we are not a veterans service organization (VSO) dedicated to unconditional protection of entitlements and benefits, without a clear and compelling linkage to recruiting, retention and sustainment of the Reserve Component.

ROA may demonstrate a bias toward serving members, and a lesser emphasis on retired member affairs. Members point out the need for more recruitment of serving officers to ROA ranks. We can't have it both ways if we intend to attract those Operational Reserve officers who are taking care of us. We have to clearly demonstrate and communicate to them that ROA supports our citizen warriors and their families. We must continue to show that ROA is the preeminent association representing the issues of importance to reserves today. If ROA fails to do this, we risk our relevance and ignore the mission given us in our Charter.

Our 5 Year Virtual Term Member ranks are growing at an increasing rate. As such we will begin to proactively push *The Officer* to them electronically each issue rather than making these members have to come to the web-site to view it.

Chapter communications with local members is an area in great need of some innovative solutions. With two-thirds of ROA Chapters inactive it is clear that member's desires to hear of grassroots activities are being unmet. The Committee on Department and Chapter Development (DCDC) has the mission to take on this challenge.

Development

Following a 15 year relationship with Premium Based Direct Mail Vender

Barton-Cotton, ROA will no longer conducting these mailings! Although members donated generously to some of the mailings, others were unwanted as noted in the comments, and the frequency of the mailings was offensive to many. The conclusion of this long time direct mail effort provides an opportunity for ROA to redefine our methods to reach out to the membership in a manner that will receive more widespread acceptance of how and why we convey the need to potential donors for regular and systematic financial support to the association. Annual Giving through programs such as Sustaining Member participation is expected to establish renewable patterns of giving in support of ROA. It will also replace and enhance the revenue provided by the previous mailings. Our new strategy will build on and substantially grow the base of loyal supporters.

We will share the services of ROA in ways that validate the needs of the association, and best illustrate the resources that are needed to fund our programs. ROA will be committed to the best practices in matching donors with their specific needs.

In this time of transition as we strive to firmly establish a Culture of Philanthropy at ROA we must remember that our members hold the key to our future.

We will seek to motivate them with the right messages, understand their motives, upgrade our responsiveness to their concerns, and have a more visible transparency that feeds member confidence. We will remember to say thank you (recognition) in a more effective manner.

Communications

The survey responses in the area of communication were primarily positive, stating the internal media options are quite useful and provide relevant information to members. However, issues exist regarding the need for different communications approaches with different generations. It appears that when the wrong strategy is applied to a specific age group, it tends to frustrate and eventually discourage the group from participating with the Reserve Officer's Association. There are a few trends that stand out within the data and the personal comments. The following is my analysis, Actions I am taking and the status of those actions.

In the survey 82% agreed or strongly agreed that the ROA does a good job communicating information, while 79% agreed or strongly agreed that ROA's website provides easily accessible information on its website. Members are able to find information and learn about events and issues in general and on the website. However, only 40% of members ranked the magazine as their preferred means of receiving ROA information, followed by the e-mail and e-newsletter (37% and 19% respectively). The Officer is read by 89% of all members who responded, 93% believe that it provides useful information, and 80% of respondents always or often read the legislative pages of the Officer. Thus, the magazine is quite useful for members and can be an important tool in disseminating information. Meanwhile 65% of the respondents receive and read the e-newsletter, and 85% agree or strongly agree that the e-newsletter provides useful information.

While the statistics are good, the people who responded self selected and do not represent a randomized picture of the ROA membership. Because the respondents were primarily solicited electronically and the survey was electronic only, the numbers for electronic resources may be

higher. It should be noted that any other means of a survey (telephone or paper copy) is cost prohibitive for ROA and not suggested.

- ACTION 1: Pay to have the membership email database appended by a professional organization to increase member emails from the 19,000 on file. Researched costs are based on the size of our “file” and should be budgeted for approximately \$10,000.

The actual usefulness of the website and other media is lower than the magazine, but it is heartening to see that people believe that the ROA material there presents useful information. However, respondent comments reveal some aspects that could be fixed or further promoted so that members realize what is available to them.

- STATUS: *We have begun a section in the eblast highlighting a single section or resource on the web site every week. We have written 2 articles in the past year directly dealing with communication resources for the Officer magazine. Through the Officer and micro-communications, we highlight various resources that are required actions such as Dept/Chapter minimum standards and tax information.*

Members expressed a desire for more meaty articles. They believe that the articles provide information that could be found somewhere else or do not attempt to deal with controversial issues.

- RESPONSE: Articles appearing in the Officer Magazine are unique to the Officer. It is a criteria for publication. Because of the Officer’s publication schedule, current news is often outdated by the time it gets in people’s mailboxes.
- ACTION 2 : Improve the Capitol Hill Connection section to provide analysis of what is occurring on the hill versus reporting recent actions.
- ACTION 3: Improve service sections of the Officer to provide critical analysis on legislation and policies affecting each service.

Some of the members are negative regarding the “new media,” which suggests a generational gap that prefers paper copies instead of accessing everything through the internet. It may be important to restructure the strategy for reaching older members while promoting the alternative media to organize and involve greater numbers of currently serving officers. This observation could be important with the next complaint, which is that ROA needs to conduct more grassroots campaigns to make the membership feel more connected. New media could help arrange meetings or young professional events that could help young officers network or socialize. Further, this could help attract lower grade officers, which many respondents felt were lacking from the membership rolls at ROA. This idea could also encourage older members to promote the new media in order to ensure survival of the chapters.

- ACTION 4: Create Member’s forum on web site on reality of ROA as a grass roots organization.
- ACTION 5: Develop communications plan to improve grass roots action
- ACTION 6: Focus legislative calls to action on the membership as well as the legislature in that even if an ROA position through a letter writing campaign will have no impact on a

policy or decision – at least the members have been empowered to act and see ROA’s priorities. This in turn could stimulate more grass roots initiative.

- ACTION 7: Increase usership of social media outlets. *STATUS: ROA has a robust following on Twitter, Facebook and Linked-In.*
- ACTION 8: We must establish more interactive outlets such as a blog, online magazine comment forms, and online member forums. *STATUS: The first member forum on the voting amendment has been received with some success.*
- ACTION 9: Incorporate New Media brief into ROA Academy. *STATUS: First one will be conducted in Orlando.*

Other respondents felt that ROA focuses too much on active service members and does not do as much for the reserve component or retired veterans. This complaint is due to ignorance of ROA’s mission.

- ACTION 10: ROA should continue to increase promotion of its activities for the reserve components
- ACTION 11: Create a system to let people know what they are doing and how they can directly impact the events. *STATUS: Created ROA Today on the front page of the web. Increased use of Facebook to issue statements. Increased use of media outreach. Increased coverage of DEF events in the Officer.*

Another problem was the constant stream of requests for donations and junk mail, which frustrated many of the respondents. They asked that it be reduced and that more attention be spent on member services and not fundraising.

- *STATUS: Since the time of the survey, ROA’s relationship with its direct mail solicitor has ended. Members will receive significantly less mail in this regard, however ROA still needs to raise money through donations. An increased online “ask” for donations is part of our culture of philanthropy communication plan, currently in execution.*

Operations

- IAVA (Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America): “IAVA has left ROA, VFW, and AL in the dust when it comes to relevant information. I KNOW how to do my military duties – I have been doing so for 20+ years and I receive Army training, etc., but the benefits part, the retirement part, the pay part, only IAVA does well.” What is telling about this is that this member represents the leadership that we need to influence younger serving officers to join ROA. This member is probably an O-4 or O-5. These are some of the important voices we need to listen to about how we can be more relevant to serving members of the Guard and Reserve.
- “Why not advertise for members on sites such as military.com, Air Force Association, etc.?” Why not? If that is where serving members go for information, it makes good sense. Military.com is currently advertising on our site!

The anecdotal information can tell us more about the subjective and psychographic data than the percentages in many cases. I believe that we should publish the more cogent comments on the e-blast and see what sort of reactions we get from our members.

Defense Education Forum

The survey elicited only a few comments on our Defense Education Forum and its educational efforts. There were positive comments – “ROA is doing a spectacular job with the Defense Education Forum” and one comment that felt “Legislation has suffered as a result of the emphasis on DEF.” A couple of comments shared the idea that DEF needed more visibility including outside of DC forums. We have begun to do this (e.g. Indiana in November 2008) and will continue to do so with our National Security Symposium in 2010 at some central location. We are also attempting to increase the ability of our members to share in DEF programs by posting video, PPT, and short reports to our website about DEF programs. These are in addition to *The Officer*, Eblast, and DEF newsletter reports on programs.

Legislative and Military Policy

The responses on legislation were positive, with 91 percent approval with the belief by our responding members that ROA has been able to impact legislation affecting Reservists, as well as 72 percent feeling that ROA leaders and staff are aggressive and bold in criticism of those who oppose items on ROA’s legislative agenda. However, 42 percent felt that an area needing additional work was grass roots. As one member stated, “It seems that our grass roots interest and involvement has waned.” A future goal is for grass roots to grow beyond electronic alerts, and be rebuilt at the department and chapter level.