

## **The Round Tables: food for thought**

The round table sessions at the annual conference are a vital opportunity for the Board of Directors to obtain advice and direction from delegates in a relatively informal setting. This year, the Board added the informational presentations that preceded the discussions and posed 10 questions to help guide discussion, with brief background notes. The questions and background notes have been slightly edited for clarity.

The discussions were, we believe, very valuable and we have done our best to distill and summarize them here. We hope that delegates, RA executives and individual members will not only find some practical ideas in this summary but also take the time to send us any ideas, questions or concerns that arise from reading this summary (including, of course, any relevant topics not posed by the Board). The most effective targets are Fred Fletcher ([ffletch@yorku.ca](mailto:ffletch@yorku.ca)) and Mary Johnston [generic email; do I have one??].

It is also worth noting that the most active RAs have excellent newsletters and/or websites, most of which can be accessed by going to the member associations list on the CURAC website ([www.curac.ca](http://www.curac.ca)) and clicking on the name of the RA. Details of the programs of each RA – that is, best practices -- are easily found there.

### **First 15 Minutes: Retiree Association Best Practice**

#### **a. Tell us about the best event / activity your RA did in the past year**

Many examples of successful events were mentioned. Among the most ambitious were a group trip to China, dinner cruises on local rivers, tours of local attractions (including a marijuana operation), train trips, a weekly lecture series (25 in all). Also popular are periodic updates on developments on campus, including tours of new buildings. An annual reception for retirees hosted by the university or college president attracts a strong attendance at some institutions.

The emeritus college model is attracting some attention, especially when university recognition and funding is forthcoming. (For details on the general model and the UBC example, see the Winter 2018 edition of the CURAC/ARUCC newsletter, archived under Newsletters on the website.)

The China trip – organized by a skilled member of the RA – was considered the best of the suggestion at its table. It was pointed out that, lacking such a colleague, any RA could work through CURAC's affinity partners Collette or, for a customized tour, Trip Merchant, to put together a group adventure. Trips and educational events were seen as attractive to members. Free membership for the first year was also deemed effective. In some cases, retirees automatically become members upon retirement. A number of RAs mentioned seminars on practical topics for retirees, such as a round table on pension investment.

A few RAs were able to point to breakthroughs in obtaining institutional support. One RA reported success in gaining access to the names of the newly retired. Another was able to obtain office space and a part-time assistant. Campus parking passes are also popular. Several suggestions involved ways to remind senior administrators of the continuing contributions of retirees.

Recruitment of new retiree members is a challenge for most RAs (though a few have automatic membership). An important approach is to invite prospective retirees to an educational event on retirement issues, possibly in collaboration with the HR unit, through campus newspapers or relevant online publications. It is highly desirable to include material on the RA in any handouts on retirement from HR and to participate in their pre-retirement seminars whenever possible. In terms of content, it is important to communicate to prospective retirees the benefits and services provided by the RA, perhaps including a calendar of events.

**b. Should CURAC have an award for RA Best Practice?**

In general, the award proposal was viewed as a good idea. This would encourage sharing of best practices. It was also suggested that CURAC develop an app that would lead members to announcements of RA activities.

**Remaining 40 minutes: choose two or more questions to discuss**

1. A CURAC objective is to support “mutual assistance” among member RAs. **What does your local RA gain from CURAC membership?**

The focus here was on CURAC as a source of information about the activities of RAs across the country and the post-retirement environment in general. It became clear that many delegates, even though active in their local RAs, were not as well informed about CURAC as they wanted to be.

An important theme was the desirability of letting RAs know what other RAs are doing across the country, possibly through a “**best practices**” link on the CURAC website. It would be very useful if an ongoing conversation could be generated. One topic that might be addressed is how local RAs can participate in CURAC affinity partnerships and possibly negotiate some of their own where appropriate.

The fact that some delegates were unaware that CURAC conducts a survey of retirement benefits among its members every two or three years appears to be another communication gap. It is important to ensure that RA leaders know that these data are available, that their cooperation is required, and that reports from CURAC committees, including the Benefits Committee, are available on the website.

2. CURAC brings value to retirees and RAs through affinity partnerships with companies that provide special rates and discounts or services to members. **How should CURAC best work with affinity partners? How much marketing of these programs should CURAC do?**

It was noted that the opportunities offered by affinity programs were not widely known. There appeared to be a desire for more easily accessible information. See suggestions below.

3. CURAC encourages RAs to share CURAC news and information with their members. **How can CURAC better help your RA to forward CURAC news to your members?**
4. There was a consensus that the communications failure between CURAC and the individual members of associated RAs was a result of the absence of an effective channel to those members. On this point, it was suggested that every RA should have a “CURAC representative” responsible for sharing CURAC information with its executive and also distributing CURAC messages in a timely manner to individual members. It was noted that many RAs themselves face challenges in gaining the attention of their members.

A number of suggestions were made for making CURAC messages more appealing. These included circulating and/or posting on the CURAC website a short video on the benefits of CURAC membership and, as well, a video or videos promoting the association’s affinity partners. Other ideas included careful curation of emails to avoid email fatigue, seeking content and subject headings that are attention-grabbing, and using Facebook to promote an ongoing engagement with CURAC. There was disagreement as to whether single subject or combined topic emails would be more effective.

It was also suggested that the Board should consider trying out an app for mobile phones. Webinars on important topics might also draw participants if effectively promoted. (It is worth noting that webinars offered by some affinity partners have been tried, with only modest take-up. Perhaps webinars on retirement-related topics, such as pensions or power of attorney, might get more attention.)

The participants at one table noted that data on the redistribution of CURAC messages to individual members was lacking. It was suggested that the Communications Committee seek feedback from current primary contacts on their dissemination policies and activities and also their sense of how the messages are received by members.

5. A CURAC objective is to “speak publicly on issues of concern to the more than 15,000 individual college and university retirees across Canada.” CURAC has or is developing relationships with organizations such as Universities Canada, CAUT, CARP and others. **Does your RA wish to engage with the programs of such organizations?**

In general, CURAC's role as a liaison with other national organizations was regarded favourably. CURAC's involvement in the Vibrant Voices initiative (described elsewhere in this newsletter) was a little more controversial. See the notes under question 7. The fact that the delegates were not familiar with the liaison work of the CURAC Board underlines the communication challenges CURAC faces.

6. For many years, CURAC has produced Health Care Bulletins on seniors' issues. RAs are asked for input on drafts circulated by email. **Does your RA discuss these bulletins and/or forward them to members? Are there Health Care issues that CURAC should research?**

The CURAC health-related bulletins were generally viewed positively. Topics suggested included "seniors and mental health, with particular attention to suicide" and issues surrounding advanced care.

7. A CURAC objective is "to coordinate activities that promote communication among member associations." **How should CURAC communicate with your RA leaders and with individual members?**

It was suggested at one table that the organization of networks of RA members would be a useful initiative. Other responses to this question were reported under question 3, above.

8. CURAC is participating in a consortium of retiree organizations promoting discussion of issues related to the health of seniors in the upcoming federal election campaign. **Would your RA wish to engage with local campaigns in your area by talking about these issues during the campaign?**

Opinion was divided on the practicality of this proposal. On a positive note, it was suggested that it would be useful for the Board to formulate a model message for RAs and/or talking points on the topics in question. A related suggestion was that targeted questions in bullet-point form be developed by the Health Care Policy Committee for circulation to RA members for possible use in all-candidates meetings. (The non-partisan nature of this initiative and the actions that might be considered by RAs are explored elsewhere in this newsletter.)

9. The CURAC is seeking input on how it can better serve its member associations. **What does your RA want from CURAC that it does not do now?**

Suggestions included preparing a manual on how to set up a retiree organization, continuing work on sharing best practices, improving communication on affinity programs and on CURAC Board activities in general. In particular, it was suggested that CURAC should make it possible for RAs to open their planned tours and other events to members of other RAs, space permitting. The events could be advertised on a community "bulletin board" on the CURAC

website or in email communiques to the primary contacts at RAs across the country. A related suggestion was the distribution of a monthly CURAC communique by email that could include such information. For some, the communique could replace the newsletter, which is not widely read. Others found information on the website to be not easily accessible and thought it could be a little more user-friendly. It was noted that the newsletter and bulletins could be easier to find. (Here, we invite you to check out the website.) Some felt that a model communication strategy for RAs would be seen as a benefit from CURAC, especially for smaller RAs.

### **Other issues arising from the discussions**

Some current issues that CURAC should consider addressing were identified:

- 1) Double-dipping: What are the conditions under which people can continue working after retirement at different institutions? It might be useful for CURAC to address the issue in its liaison role.
- 2) Relations with university administrations: CURAC should consider sharing best practices with university administrations, as well as with member RAs. It is useful to remind university administrators of the benefits of an active RA association. It might be possible to address university and college administrators through their associations.
- 3) CURAC could play a vital role in securing better information on what retirees are doing post-retirement. Several universities have done this (University of Toronto, York, UBC), as have some major American institutions (as noted elsewhere in this newsletter). The results tend to be similar: one-third stay professionally active; one-third are involved in their communities; one-third retire from active life. Many retirees contribute to scholarship funds, mentor young faculty and graduate students, serve on committees, present guest lectures and seminars, and assist with convocations, to name a few relevant activities. In general, it was felt that preparing materials to assist RAs in dealing with administrators at their institutions would be very helpful.

Compiled by Fred Fletcher and Kent Percival, with the assistance of table rapporteurs (Nora Gaskin, Jim Gurd, Linda Kealey, Susan Nesrallah and Frans De Bruyn).