

**“Reinventing Retirement”** was the theme at the annual Big Ten Retirees’ Association meeting the first weekend in August. The University of Illinois hosted the event, which attracted about 35 participants. Maryland and Rutgers did not send representatives.

Those attending talked about best practices for engagement. Common themes emerged.

## **Challenges**

- Getting access to retirees’ names/contact information from university HR departments so retirees can be invited to join.
- Competition for active retirees’ time and interest. Many are involved with charities, travel, grandchildren, church, other interests.
- Broadening the membership in terms of diversity across employee status: faculty, managerial/professional, office/service.
- Keeping programs fresh without burning out the most-engaged volunteers.
- Presenting retirement as a new chapter in an employee’s relationship with the university.
- Figuring out how to handle parking and costs for on-campus luncheons. Each school faces these problems. Several use internet-based RSVP reservation systems; most have ditched printed newsletters and send them only electronically or print just a few for those who wish to receive paper versions.

## **Opportunities**

- Retiree associations can provide positive transitions for new retirees by offering mentoring in areas other than financial advice. Every university offers pre-retirement services, but they seem to focus mostly on financials and, in some instances, health insurance. Most do not deal with the social-emotional aspects of retirement. Our associations can help retirees find new purpose and meaning and help them learn how to retain social contacts and make new contacts.
- Associations can function as resources for retirees.
- They can help retirees explore ways to volunteer with and for the university.
- They can foster mutually beneficial relationships, helping retirees give back to the university while enjoying a continuing relationship with the school.
- Associations should try to quantify the volunteer hours their members give to both their universities and to external agencies because this a way to demonstrate the value they contribute.

It was interesting to note the size and scope of other associations and how their memberships are created. If a university has a state-managed retirement system (such as those at Illinois and Wisconsin), then all retirees are automatically members, often across an entire university system. At Northwestern, only faculty are eligible for the association.

### **Other ideas that were floated:**

- Videotape and post association programs to webpages or Facebook Live. This does not have to be high tech and can be done using cellphones if the wi-fi is robust. These seem particularly useful for organizations with memberships across a state.

- Create online chat rooms and salons. These work best for organizations that have statewide systems.
- Create interest groups like those promoted through OLLI, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Our coffee chats are similar.
- Collaborate with OLLI. (Our association already does this.)
- Secure sponsorships for various events or newsletters to defray costs. Michigan raises about \$30K a year via sponsorships (credit union, TIAA, Fidelity, other organizations) that they use to pay for events and for a scholarship.
- Minnesota offers an “Encore Transitions” class to the public that raises a lot of money and is designed to help retirees with all aspects of retirement. It apparently attracts about 400 people each year.

We toured the Illinois campus, noting they are undergoing a significant amount of construction, including a new center for emerging media arts, a new football field house, and renovation of residence halls. A faculty member presented work she and students are doing to create and test technologies to aid the 55+ population. We also visited the Advanced Visualization Laboratory at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications.

We enjoyed a dinner at the Illinois Alumni Center; we were particularly impressed by a huge interactive museum display that was created for Illinois’ Sesquicentennial in 2017.

We are grateful to the association for allowing us to be Nebraska’s representatives at this meeting. Next year’s meeting is Aug. 7-9 at the University of Iowa.

Kim Hachiya and Pat Crews