

Guide to Member Surveys

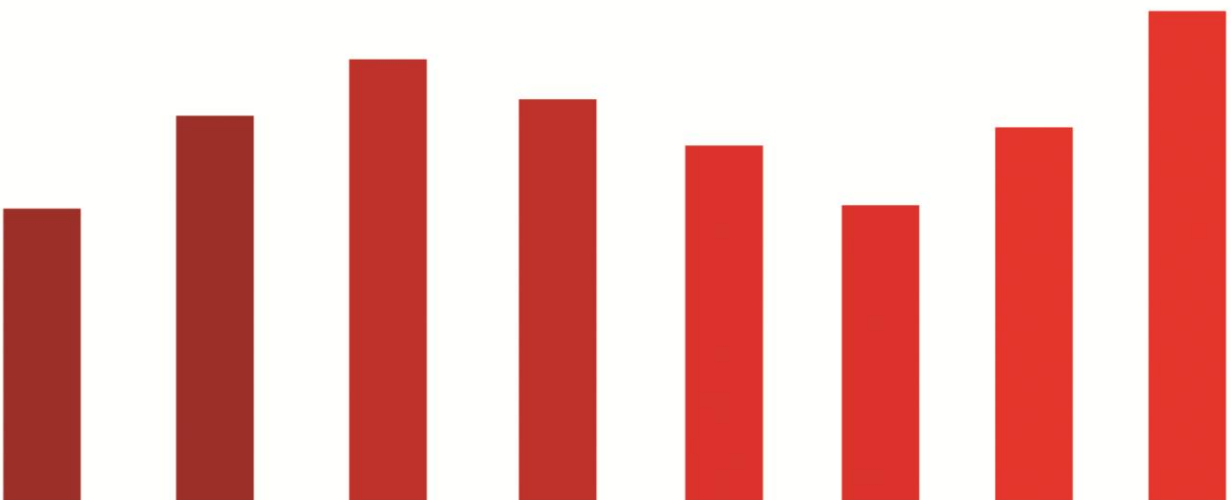


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Preface

Voice-of-the-member research is an excellent means of determining first hand what members want from their association membership, and how well members perceive the association is delivering on the benefits and programs that members value.

The purpose of this document is to assist association executives and Board members as they plan and implement member research, and to assist in interpreting and reporting the results of their research. By understanding what members want, and satisfying those wants and needs, members are more likely to renew their membership, recommend the association to other like-minded individuals and organizations, participate in the programs offered by the association, and serve as an association volunteer.

This guide describes the purpose of each of the following six member analyses, and explains how to conduct them with actual survey questions, and report their results.

1. Member Needs Analysis
2. Member Benefits Performance Analysis
3. Member Benefits Awareness Analysis
4. Association Performance Analysis
5. Member Loyalty Analysis
6. Problem Analysis

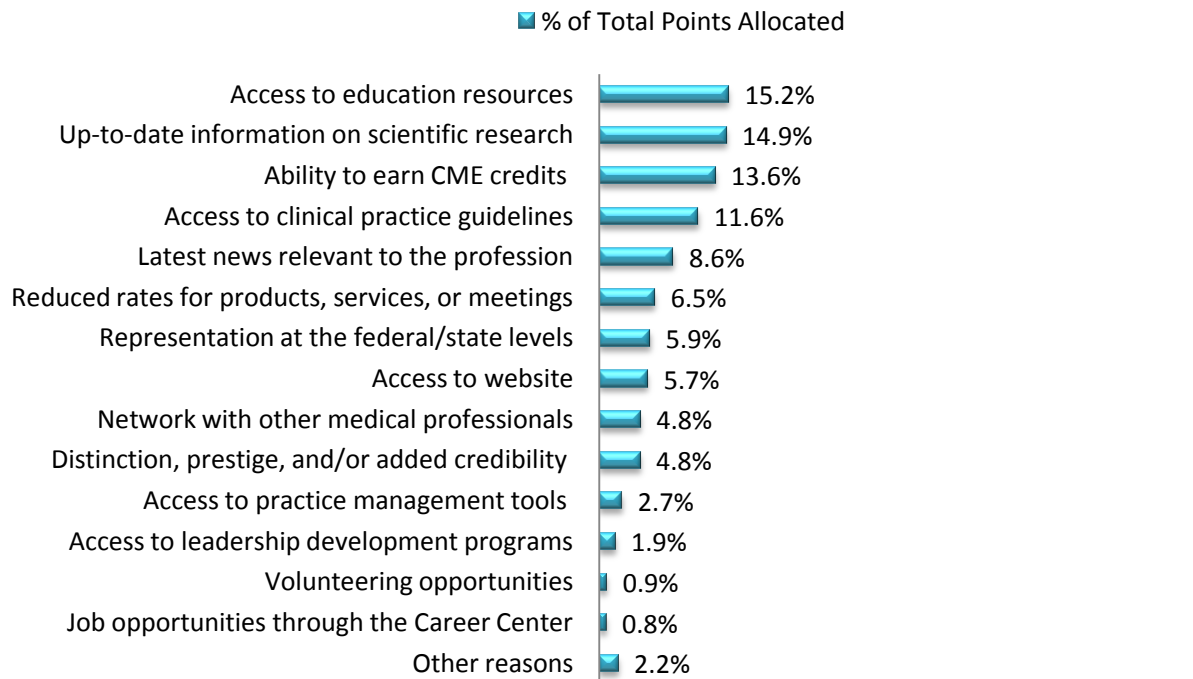
Also included in this guide are some common Do's and Don'ts of member research, based on decades of member research experience.

1. Member Needs Analysis

Members belong to associations to satisfy a variety of personal and professional needs, and all members do not belong for the same reasons. Nor do they place the same importance on those reasons. The Member Needs Analysis uncovers the reasons why members choose to belong to an association, and what motivates them to renew their membership and participate in its programs.

This information enables the association to develop and/or improve programs and member benefits within the framework of its mission and business model that address the specific needs of its members. By matching programs and experiences to the needs and expectations of its members, the association can deliver more value to its membership, and engage its members.

This analysis generates a priority listing of why members belong to an association, similar to the sample graph below.



The graph above was generated from responses to the following survey question:

Q. Realizing that individuals may belong to an association for a variety of reasons, please tell us why you belong to ABC. Please allocate a total of 100 points to the following possible reasons, assigning more points to the reasons that are more relevant to you.

In this analysis, the focus is on why members belong to the association, rather than on why members join, since members' needs change over time and the reason(s) they originally joined may not be relevant today.

The percentages in the graph on the preceding page were calculated by adding the points allocated for each reason for belonging, and dividing that number by the total number of points given for all reasons.

The reasons for belonging to the association that are included in this question will vary by association, and should be customized to the reasons why you believe your members may belong. Be sure to include the "Other" option so members can allocate points to any reason why they might belong that is not on the list.

While the chart on the preceding page gives a clear indication of why members as a whole belong to your association, the real value of this analysis is in the segmentation of the responses to this survey question. Associations are made up of a variety of individuals, and the reasons why members belong may vary by reason as well as by priority.

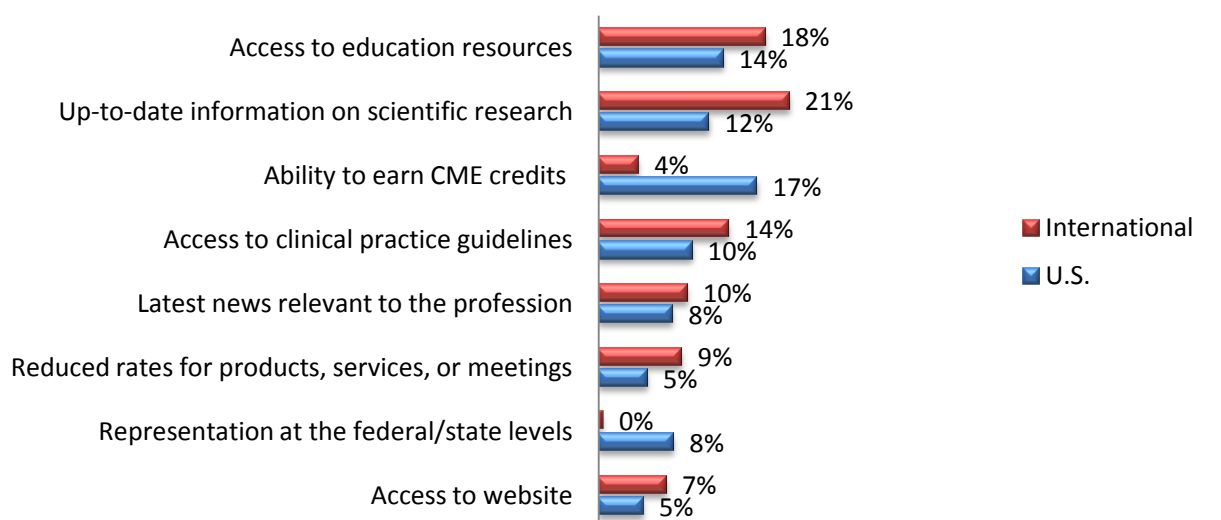
The list below shows typical segmentation bases that are used to determine if there are significant differences in why members belong to your association, which can then be used to fine tune benefits and programs to major segments of your membership. In some cases this information may be available in your membership database and can be appended to survey responses, and in other cases this information will be collected from survey questions.

1. Member's loyalty/engagement classification
2. Membership type (e.g. Professional, Associate, Vendor, etc.)
3. Employment situation (Owner, Employee, etc.)
4. Employment type (Full time, Part time)
5. Gender / sex
6. Race / ethnicity
7. Formal education
8. Years in the profession
9. Years a member of the association
10. Generation (age)
11. Leadership involvement (Board, Committee, etc.)
12. Certifications/licenses held

Typically, only those reasons that are in the top half of the priority chart, or received at least 5% of the total points, are used in the segmentation analysis. By calculating the percentage of points for each of the major reasons for belonging in each classification, association executives can determine where significant differences exist that may require individualized attention.

The example illustration below shows that International members in this association are more likely than American members to belong to the association in order to have access to educational resources, scientific research, and access to clinical practice guidelines. U.S. members place a higher priority on belonging in order to earn educational credits.

This segmentation analysis enables the Board and management team to target the association's offerings to those member segments that have different needs, rather than using a "one size fits all" approach. In this analysis, you may find member categories where there are no significant differences. For example, it is rare to find gender differences in this analysis. However, in the relatively short time that it takes to test all available member characteristics, a wealth of information is available for understanding what specific groups of members want from your association.



2. Member Benefits Performance Analysis

In our experience, the number one factor that impacts members' perception of the value of their association membership is member benefits. There are two analyses that can be used to assess and evaluate member benefits. The first one that we will discuss is the Member Benefits Performance Analysis, which determines how well each member benefit is currently performing, as rated by members.

The first question in the benefits section of the survey should be an overall rating for benefits in general:

Q. How would you rate the overall quality of ABC's member benefits?

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor
6. Don't know

This question should be immediately followed by a question in which respondents rate each individual member benefit currently being offered:

Q. Please rate the overall quality of each of the following ABC member benefits.

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor
6. Don't use but am aware of
7. Was not aware of

a.	Benefit 1
b.	Benefit 2
c.	Benefit 3
d.	Benefit 4
e.	Benefit 5
f.	Benefit 6
g.	Benefit 7

It is important for the flow of the survey that general questions precede specific questions so that the questions that list specific benefits do not bias respondents' overall impressions.

This analysis can generate two types of charts, depending on the level of detail desired.

The more basic information is provided in the chart below, which shows the output from calculating the top two rating (i.e. the total number of excellent and very good ratings given) for each benefit. (The rationale for presenting the results as top two ratings rather than as averages will be discussed later in this document.) Notice that this chart shows the relative performance of each member benefit, but does not include its relative impact to members.

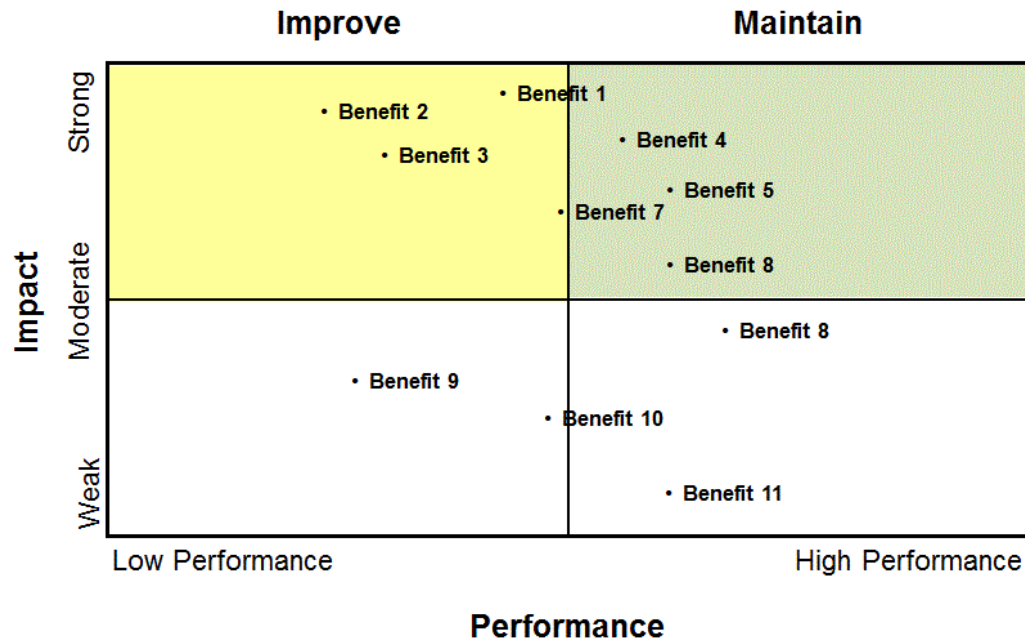


A more in-depth analysis of the performance of member benefits that does incorporate impact is shown in the Improve/Maintain matrix on the following page.

The horizontal placement for each benefit on the matrix is determined by its top two rating. The vertical line that separates the left half from the right half is at 70% top two rating. Those benefits that have a top two rating of more than 70% are placed to the right of the vertical line, with higher ratings placed farther to the right. Those benefits that have a top two rating below 70% are placed to the left of the vertical line, with lower ratings placed farther to the left.

The vertical placement of each benefit on the matrix is determined by its correlation to the overall benefits rating question – the survey question that immediately precedes the survey question for rating individual benefits. The correlation between the overall member benefits' rating and each individual benefit's rating can be calculated using Excel. (It is beyond the scope of this document to discuss Excel Correlations. For assistance in this area, please consult Excel, view the Excel tutorials on You Tube, or contact me.)

Those benefits that have the highest impact (correlation) on members' perception of the benefits bundle are plotted in the upper half of the matrix (correlation coefficient $\geq .500$), and those with a correlation coefficient $< .500$ are placed in the lower half.



While some researchers still ask respondents to rate importance, impact scores provide a better measure of the effect that each individual benefit has on the overall perception of benefits, and can be accomplished with fewer survey questions, thus producing a shorter survey and minimizing respondent fatigue.

The visual aspect of the Improve/Maintain matrix enables the Board and management team to interpret the research results and to develop strategic improvement plans for member benefits without requiring an in-depth knowledge of statistics, or having to sift through tables of raw numbers.

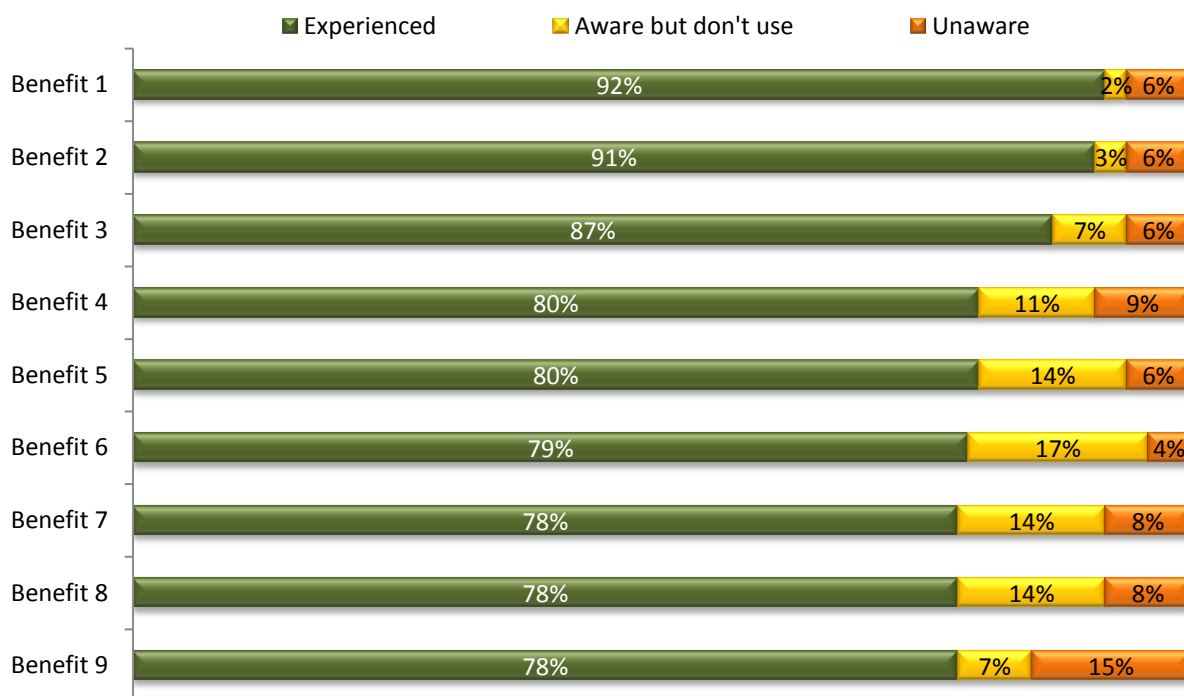
Items in the upper left (yellow) quadrant are candidates for improvement efforts, as these are high in impact, and low in performance. Those in the upper right (green) quadrant should be maintained, as these are high in impact and are performing adequately. Those items in the lower half (white section) of the matrix are a low priority, as they have a low impact on members' perception of benefits. Improving benefits in the lower half of the matrix is not expected to improve the overall perception of member benefits as much as improving those in the upper left quadrant. This matrix allows the reader to quickly determine which benefits to improve, as it considers both performance and impact simultaneously.

3. Member Benefits Awareness Analysis

We often find that members have a low perception of the value of their association's member benefits because they choose not to use some of the available benefits, and are unaware of others. The Member Benefits Awareness Analysis is used to measure the level of use and awareness of each member benefit currently being offered. No additional survey questions are required, as this analysis uses the responses from the individual benefits rating question.

In the graph below, the left portion of each bar indicates the percentage of member respondents who have used that particular benefit. This is the total number of respondents who rated that benefit as either excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. The middle portion indicates the percentage of survey respondents who are aware of the benefit, but have not used it. This is the percentage of respondents who selected, "don't use but am aware of" in the rating question. Finally, the right portion shows the percentage of members who have not used the benefit, and were unaware of the benefit prior to taking the survey. This is the percentage of respondents who selected "was not aware of" when rating that benefit.

If a benefit has a relatively high percentage in the middle portion of its bar, this would indicate that the benefit may not be a good fit for members, as members are electing not to use the benefit in spite of being aware of it. Before making changes, we suggest that further investigation determine if the members not using the benefit are actually in the target market for that benefit. A high percentage in the right portion indicates that the benefit may simply need to be promoted in order to raise its awareness among members, which should lead to an increase in usage.



4. Association Performance Analysis

In our research, we have found that the primary reason members do not renew their membership, or are not engaged with the association, is because they do not feel they are getting sufficient value from the money and effort it takes to participate as a member. The Association Performance Analysis assesses every component of the association's value proposition (e.g. member benefits, convention, communications, website, advocacy, staff, continuing education, committees, etc.) to determine the impact that each has on membership value, as well as to determine its current performance as rated by members.

The overall value rating question should appear in the survey prior to rating any of the components of the association:

Q. How would you rate the overall value of your ABC membership?

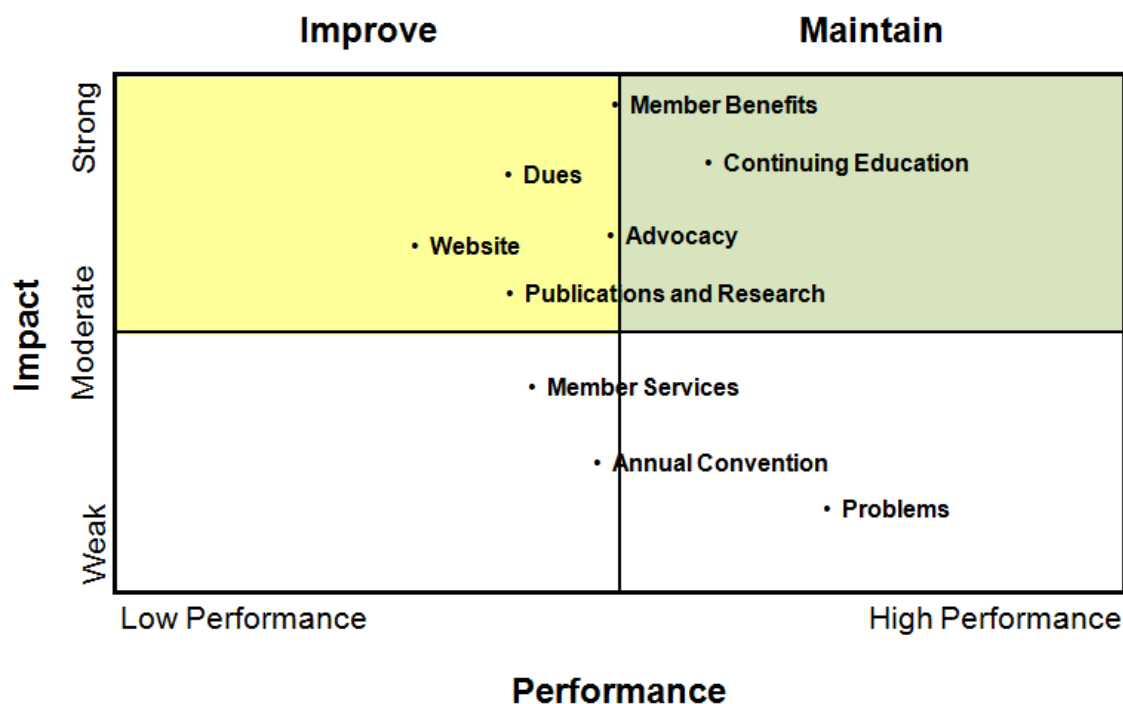
- 1. Excellent**
- 2. Very good**
- 3. Good**
- 4. Marginal**
- 5. Poor**
- 6. Don't know**

Each component of the association should be rated at some point in the survey following the value rating question. It is not necessary that these overall component rating questions be clustered together. It is actually better for each component to have its overall rating question immediately followed by other component-related questions for ease of reading.

Q. How would you rate the overall quality of ABC's continuing education programs?

- 1. Excellent**
- 2. Very good**
- 3. Good**
- 4. Fair**
- 5. Poor**
- 6. Don't know**

In this analysis, the ratings for each component (e.g. member benefits, website, continuing education, etc.) are correlated to the response given for the overall value rating question. The association's components are plotted on an Improve/Maintain matrix, using the same procedures that were used for plotting member benefits on the Member Benefits Improve/Maintain Matrix discussed in the previous section. An example of an Improve/Maintain matrix for membership value is shown on the following page.



The value matrix enables the Board and management to focus its strategic planning on those areas that have the greatest impact on the perceived value of membership and are currently underperforming (yellow quadrant) while maintaining its efforts on those key drivers that are currently meeting the needs of members (green quadrant). In the example value matrix above, the website should be considered for improvement, as it is positioned in the yellow quadrant.

Matrices can also be developed for each component of the association in order to help each Director improve his/her area. For example, in order to generate a matrix for the website, all that is required is a survey question in which members rate the overall performance of the website, followed by a question in which members rate the attributes of the website. (See the example questions below.)

Q. How would you rate the overall quality of ABC's website?

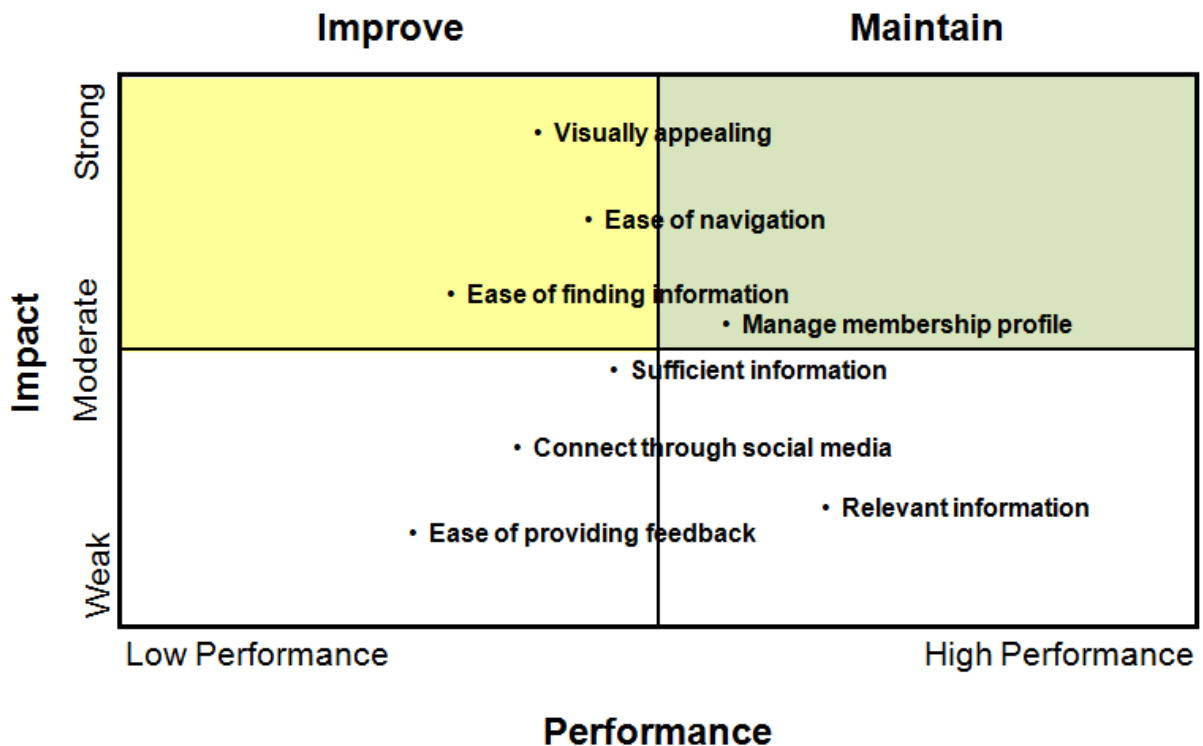
1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor
6. Don't know

Q. How would you rate ABC's website on each of the following?

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Good
4. Fair
5. Poor
6. Don't know

a.	Ease of navigation
b.	Ease of finding information
c.	Providing sufficient information
d.	Speed at which the pages load
e.	Ease of providing feedback
f.	Being visually appealing
g.	Providing relevant information
h.	Ability to connect with other members through social media

The top two ratings of the website's attributes in combination with the correlation coefficients of the attributes with the website's overall rating, produce a matrix for the website similar to the example below. The value matrix can be used to determine what to improve, while the matrices for each of the association's components can be used to determine how to improve them.



5. Member Loyalty Analysis

Every association member has a personal relationship with the association, and the quality of that relationship varies by individual. As of this writing, the latest buzz word regarding member relationships is engagement, which is synonymous with involvement. It is clear that engagement or involvement benefits the association in terms of non-dues revenue generated from convention attendance, continuing education enrollment, and premium benefits purchases.

However, there are a variety of reasons why members can have a strong relationship with the association and still not attend the convention or participate in other activities. We refer to our measure of the strength of the relationship between the association and its members as loyalty.

The loyalty analysis enables the association to:

1. hone its marketing efforts to attract new members who exhibit the characteristics of its most loyal members,
2. improve the association in ways that will strengthen the relationship it has with its neutral members in order to migrate them to the loyal category, and
3. target vulnerable (at-risk) members with intervention programs to minimize member defections and increase member engagement.

We (and other research firms) measure loyalty by examining the responses to three survey questions.

Q. If someone in your profession were to ask your advice on belonging to a professional association, how likely would you be to recommend ABC?

1. Extremely likely
2. Very likely
3. Somewhat likely
4. Not very likely
5. Not at all likely
6. Don't know

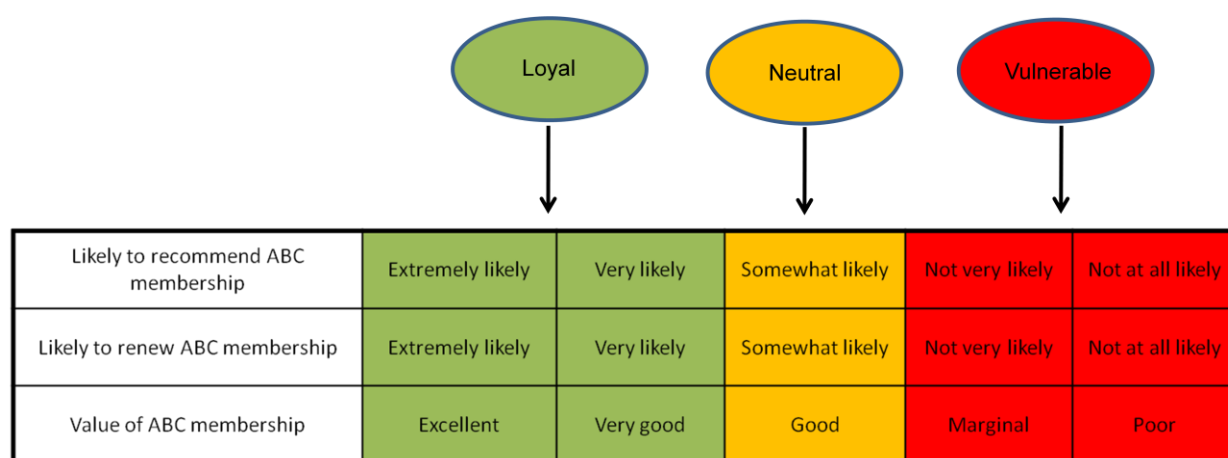
Q. How likely are you to renew your ABC membership?

1. Extremely likely
2. Very likely
3. Somewhat likely
4. Not very likely
5. Not at all likely
6. Don't know

Q. How would you rate the overall value of your ABC membership?

1. **Excellent**
2. **Very good**
3. **Good**
4. **Marginal**
5. **Poor**
6. **Don't know**

Respondents are classified as either Loyal, Neutral, or Vulnerable depending on how they answer these three questions. The illustration below shows the rules for determining each respondent's classification.



Respondents are classified as Loyal if they give a top two response to all three questions (all in the green region). If a respondent gives responses that fall into the yellow region, or a combination of yellow and green, that person would be classified as Neutral. Any response in the red region would cause the respondent to be classified as Vulnerable (at-risk of leaving the association).

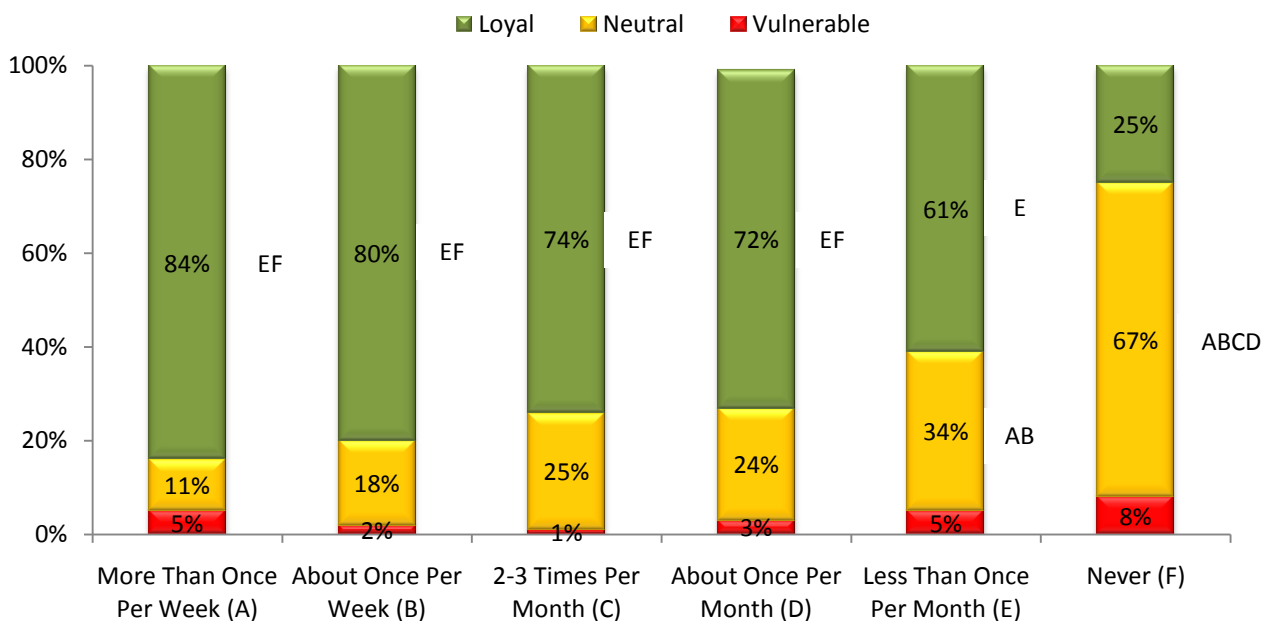
The percentage of members that fall into each of the three categories can be used as an overall scorecard measure to see how well the association is delivering on its value proposition to its members in ways that are valued by its members.

Once the loyalty classification has been assigned, a series of segmentation analyses can be performed, similar to the segmentation analyses conducted in the Member Needs Analysis. This determines which member segments are being satisfied and which segments may need individual attention.

As part of this analysis, all member segments can be analyzed (e.g. membership type, age, gender, volunteerism, annual convention attendance, problem experience, dues reimbursement, etc.) to identify which member segments have a higher percentage of loyal

members (or a lower percentage of loyal members). This analysis can also be used to determine if members who have had various experiences with the association (e.g. contact with Member Services, convention attendance, continuing education classes, website visits, volunteerism, etc.) have a higher or lower percentage of loyal members.

The sample bar graph below shows the differences in loyalty based on the frequency of members' visits to the organization's website. In this example, we see that there is a positive correlation between loyalty and the frequency of visiting the association's website.



6. Problem Analysis

The Problem Analysis is conducted by including a four question module in the survey:

Q. Have you experienced any problems with ABC during the past six months?

- 1. Yes**
- 2. No (SKIP OUT OF SECTION)**
- 3. Don't know (SKIP OUT OF SECTION)**

Q. What was the nature of your problem? _____

Q. Did you report the problem to anyone at ABC?

- 1. Yes**
- 2. No (SKIP OUT OF SECTION)**
- 3. Don't know (SKIP OUT OF SECTION)**

Q. Was the problem resolved to your satisfaction?

- 1. Yes**
- 2. No**
- 3. Don't know**

The first question in this sequence provides the percentage of individuals who have experienced a problem. It is typical for associations to have a problem incidence of 4% - 7%.

The second question provides detailed information on the root causes of problems that members have recently experienced.

The second and third questions together can be used to determine which types of problems members are less likely to report. Research has shown that the number one reason problems go unreported is that individuals believe that nothing will be done to rectify the problem even if the problem were reported.

Do's and Don'ts – Rating Scales

Research on rating scales has shown that fully labeled scales are more reliable, they eliminate the biases of numerical rating scales, and they provide better information. Numerical scales (e.g. on a scale of 1 – 7, 1 – 10, or 1 – 100), and partial numerical scales (e.g. easy, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, difficult) are less reliable because they allow respondents to define the scale points. That is, respondents are allowed to interpret what constitutes a rating of 4 and how that is different from a rating of 5. Because numerical scales are subject to personal interpretation, one person's 6 is frequently another person's 8. This renders conclusions drawn from their analyses less reliable and less dependable.

Research has also shown that scales should optimally have between five and seven alternatives/choices. This number of alternatives does a good job of capturing data and provides a sufficient number of categories for statistical analyses.

We recommend using five point labeled rating scales for closed ended questions that include the option of "Don't know" (DK). The table below shows which scales should be used for which types of questions. These scales are common in the research industry.

Question Type	Examples	Scale
Performance	Overall rating of website Overall rating of staff	Excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, DK
Value	Overall value of the association's membership	Excellent, very good, good, marginal, poor, DK
Price	Overall rating of dues	Low, somewhat low, just right, somewhat high, high, DK
Behaviors	Likely to recommend the association Likely to renew membership	Extremely likely, very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, not at all likely, DK

Do's and Don'ts – Measuring Satisfaction

We don't recommend asking members to rate their satisfaction with the association, for the following reasons.

1. Satisfaction is a rating of past experiences and is a poor predictor of future behavior. We have found many cases of individuals who indicated that they are satisfied with an experience (e.g. attending annual convention), but they never participated in that experience in the future.
2. Satisfaction, by definition, is the degree to which a person's expectations are met or surpassed. Therefore, there are two variables in play – expectations and experiences.
3. Satisfaction ratings can be manipulated by altering a person's expectations. Two individuals with similar experiences will have different levels of satisfaction if they had different expectations.
4. Satisfaction numbers are generally inflated. It is common to have satisfaction numbers above 95% because high satisfaction is easy to attain. This is due in part to the scales being used, and in part due to how respondents are asked to consider satisfaction. It is common to have satisfaction in the high 90s, while retention is in the low to mid 80s.

We recommend measuring loyalty instead of satisfaction, as loyalty has been shown to be a better predictor of future behavior – including membership renewals.

Do's and Don'ts – Reporting Results as Averages

While some researchers still report performance ratings as averages, the more acceptable way of reporting opinions and attitudes is with top two ratings. A top two rating is the total number of respondents who have given one of the two best ratings on a five point scale. If one were using letter grades, the top two rating is synonymous with the number of A and B ratings received.

By definition, an average is a measure of central tendency in which high and low ratings offset each other to provide a "middle" number. This is particularly a problem when it comes to reporting attitudes and opinions. For example, if one respondent rates the annual convention as "excellent" and another respondent rates the annual convention as "poor", the average of those responses would be "good". However, this is misleading since neither of these two individuals think the convention is good – one thinks it is excellent and one thinks it is poor.

To avoid misleading statistics when reporting on attitudes and opinions, it is common in the research industry to use top two ratings.

As the table below illustrates, the top two ratings are different for each of the four benefits, even though they have the same average rating. In addition to top two ratings having the sensitivity to detect differences in response distributions, top two ratings measure the percentage of members who currently have strong positive opinions (i.e. provided an excellent or very good rating).

In order to change attitudes and ultimately change behavior, members must first exhibit a strong positive opinion of the attribute or process being measured. Therefore, we recommend measuring the percentage of respondents who currently provide a top two rating, and identify ways of improving the association to increase the percentage of members giving top two ratings in the future.

Rating	Rating Points	Grade	Benefit 1	Benefit 2	Benefit 3	Benefit 4
Excellent	5	A	20	50		
Very good	4	B	20		10	
Good	3	C	20		80	100
Fair	2	D	20		10	
Poor	1	F	20	50		
Total Responses			100	100	100	100
Average Rating			3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Top 2 Score			40%	50%	10%	0%

Do's and Don'ts – Impact vs. Importance

Historically, researchers have asked members to rate the performance of various aspects of the association, and then asked them how important that was to them. We do not recommend this practice. Determining importance through survey questions adds to the length of the survey and introduces biases. Additionally, importance questions tend to produce results with little discrimination, that is, most responses usually fall into either the “Very Important” category, or the “Not Important At All” category, with relatively few responses distributed in the middle of the scale.

Instead, we recommend calculating the impact on value and various components through correlation as outlined in this document for generating matrices.

Do's and Don'ts – Increasing Response Rates

Over the years, we have found the following to be helpful for increasing the response rates of surveys.

Pre-notification - Communicate with members that they can expect to be receiving surveys or survey invitations in the next day or two. Also notify members if the survey will be coming from a third party.

Cover letter – explain why the survey is being done and why it is important for them to participate.

Incentive – Provide an incentive for members to complete the survey. In order to be effective, the incentive must be something of value to the individual. It can be monetary in nature (e.g. VISA gift card), have monetary value (free association membership for one year), or altruistic (donate to the charity of their choosing). The incentive can be something substantial that is only given to a few (sweepstakes drawing for a \$100 gift card) or something nominal given to everyone (\$5 Starbucks card). The incentive should not be so valuable that it encourages individuals to fill out multiple surveys in order to get additional rewards.

Reminder notices – sending out one or two reminders to those who have not completed the survey generates higher response rates.

Thank you – sending out “Thank You” notices lets respondents know that their time and opinions are valued, and should help to increase response rates for future surveys.

For additional information or assistance with conducting member surveys, please contact:

Larry Seibert, Ph.D.
larry@associationmetrics.com
317.840.2303