

# IAAO Survey of Members and Nonmembers

by Veris Consulting, LLC

*The statements made and opinions expressed by authors in Fair & Equitable do not necessarily represent a policy position of the International Association of Assessing Officers.*

**Editor's Note:** This article summarizes data that was presented to the IAAO Executive Board on Thursday, September 13, by Veris Consulting. The data has not yet been fully analyzed by the Board or the Member Services Committee. The article was written by Kathleen Lewis-Workman and Rachel Dobis of Veris after interviews with IAAO staff and the Membership Services Committee to gain a perspective on the goals and needs of IAAO.

The International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO) recently hired Veris Consulting, LLC (Veris) to conduct survey research in order to gain a better understanding of the needs of its members. IAAO's interest was in their current members and also, assessing professionals who have discontinued membership or who have yet to join. Surveying assessing professionals in addition to current members allowed IAAO to target a demographic group of nonmembers and better understand this population. Along with demographics, they also learned about nonmembers' opinions and awareness level of IAAO, which will assist in future recruiting efforts. IAAO gathered more comprehensive information from their members in areas such as the value of current programs, continuing education, and overall member satisfaction. IAAO will use the results from both groups to help sustain and build their membership.

## Methodology

IAAO outsourced the survey design, administration, data gathering, and analysis to Veris. Two surveys were designed; a 6-page survey for members and a 2-page survey for nonmembers. Both surveys were posted on-line to ensure quick and easy completion. IAAO provided Veris with valid e-mail addresses for 4,502 members, approximately 65% of their member population.

These members received the survey link via e-mail. IAAO had mailing addresses for the remaining 2,575 members and 17,000 nonmembers. A paper version of each survey was created and mailed to those members and nonmembers. Each paper survey had a URL address to the on-line survey, along with a fax number and a postage paid return envelope. Participants could submit the survey using whichever method was most convenient for them.

---

***The two most important benefits to members are education (77%) and the monthly magazine Fair & Equitable (57%), followed by the IAAO Web site (48%), Journal of Property Tax Assessment & Administration (39%), IAAO technical standards (35%), textbooks (32%), and the Professional Designation Program (32%).***

---

To ensure confidentiality and accuracy, the survey was anonymous and all individual responses were reviewed only by Veris. One of IAAO's main goals was a high participation rate in order to obtain the most reliable survey possible. IAAO sent a prenotification postcard to all members and nonmem-

bers to let them know when the survey was arriving. IAAO representatives sent e-mails and made calls to members in their areas to encourage participation. In order to boost participation specifically from nonmembers, IAAO offered nonmember participants a chance to enter a drawing to win a free IAAO conference registration including hotel accommoda-

tions. As a result of these efforts, there was overwhelming participation from both members and nonmembers.

## Participation

A total of 3,712 useable surveys were entered on-line or returned via fax or mail including 1,733 member surveys and 1,979 nonmember surveys. A majority

of members submitted on-line, while a majority of nonmembers submitted via mail. Based on the number of useable surveys, this represents a 24% member participation rate and 12% nonmember participation rate. These samples are large enough to provide statistically valid results. The member sample and nonmember sample provide results with a 3% margin of error and 2% margin of error, respectively, at a 95% confidence interval. This is taking into account that participants were not required to answer all questions on the survey so the number of respondents for each question varies, which may affect the margin of error. Participants provided an overwhelming amount of feedback, comments, and suggestions in response to the open-ended questions. The open-ended responses provide additional clarifying information to help IAAO better understand their members and nonmembers.

## Members

The member results give IAAO the Big Picture of their membership as a whole. IAAO will use the results to evaluate how members perceive their IAAO benefits. The survey collected information on the awareness, importance, and quality level of each of their member benefits. For example, based on these measurements, IAAO can determine which benefits are in need of the most promotion and/or improvement. An interesting finding is that a majority of members are unaware of the following benefits: IAAO Directory of Vendors and Consultants, Special Interest Councils Sections, AssessorNET: IAAO on-line discussion forum, Member Lookup on the Web site, and Member-Link: searchable database of articles on the Web site (see figure 1). IAAO plans to increase awareness levels for these benefits. (see IAAO New and Improved Benefits on p.24). Not surprisingly, the benefits with low awareness levels were given lower importance ratings.

Awareness and importance of IAAO benefits appear to be positively correlated. The two most important benefits to members are education (77%) and the monthly magazine *Fair & Equitable* (57%), followed by the IAAO Web site

Figure 1. Benefits that a majority of members are unaware of

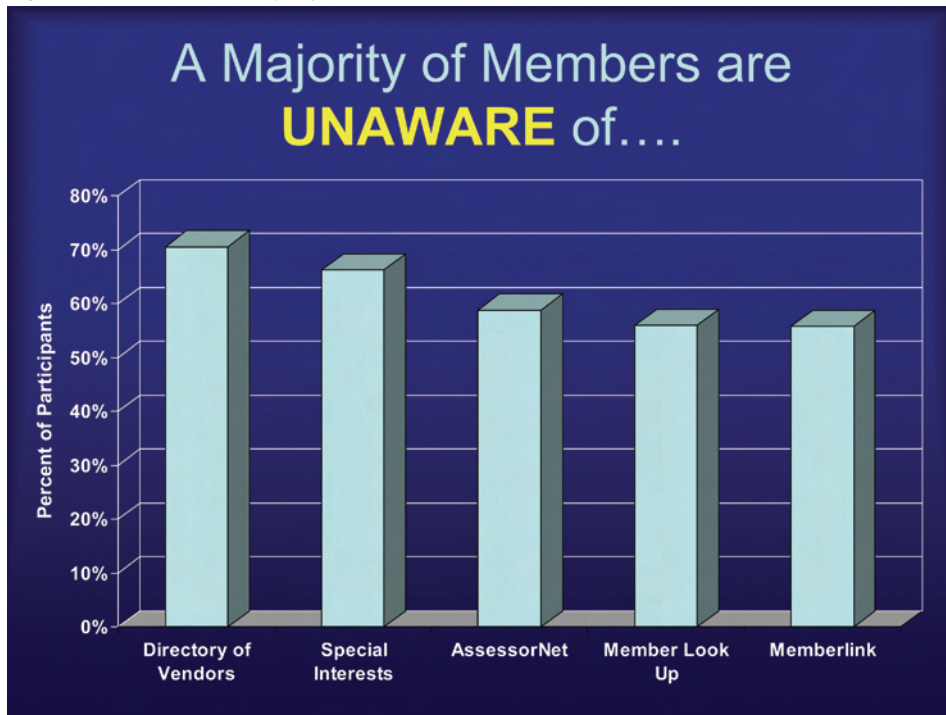
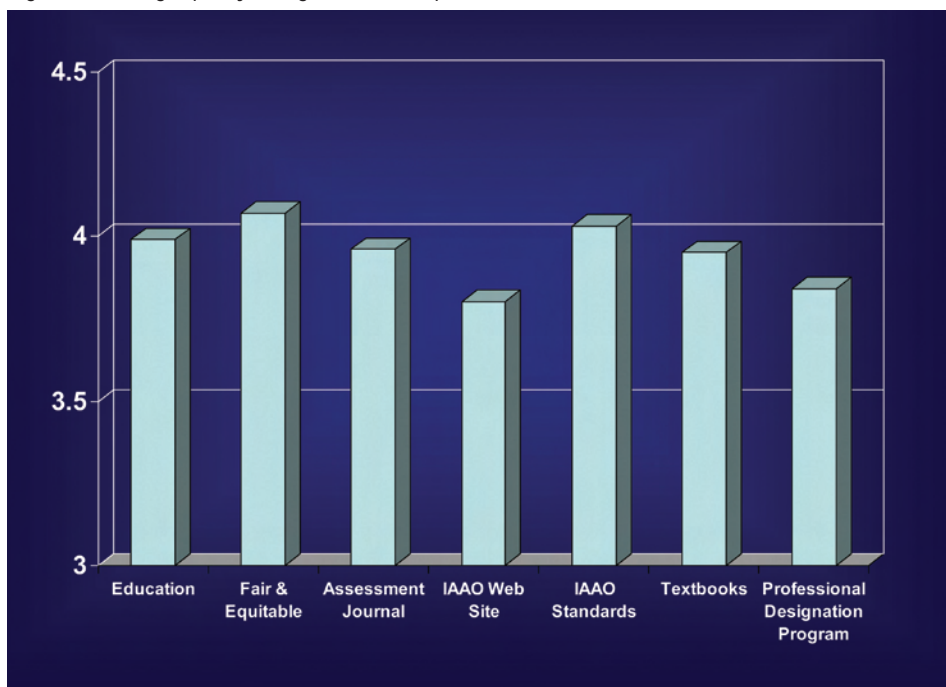


Figure 2. Average quality ratings for IAAO top benefits on a Scale of Excellent=5 to Poor=1



(48%), *Journal of Property Tax Assessment & Administration* (39%), IAAO technical standards (35%), textbooks (32%), and the Professional Designation Program (32%). Figure 2 shows the quality ratings associated with each of these top benefits. Members indicated that their top two reasons for joining IAAO are to assist in their professional development (80%) and to access IAAO educational materials or offerings (56%). Education and professional development are clearly important to both IAAO members and other assessing professionals.

### Education

IAAO gathered comprehensive information on their education and professional designation programs. They intend to use the findings to tailor these benefits to the needs of their members. The survey data indicates members would like to see IAAO develop more educational programs on mass appraisal, specifically, blending computer-assisted mass appraisal programs with GIS (56%) and general computer-assisted mass appraisal programs (49%). Seeing as this is the topic of choice, 40% of members plan to attend a mass appraisal/regression course in the next 18 months. Additionally, IAAO learned that 2-day to 3-day workshops are preferred over e-learning options or a week-long course. In response to these findings, the IAAO Education Subcommittee and the Professional Designation Subcommittee (at the time this article was written) planned to review the survey results as part of Leadership Days committee meetings, which were held in October. The survey data will be taken into account as they make their plans for the coming year. When asked to compare the IAAO education program to programs of other organizations, members rated IAAO as the best value for the price (see figure 3). The survey shows that a significant portion of overall survey respondents pursue continuing education through state assessment and appraisal associations. This survey result suggests that IAAO should continue to build and strengthen its ties with local education providers.

Figure 3. Best value for the price of education programs

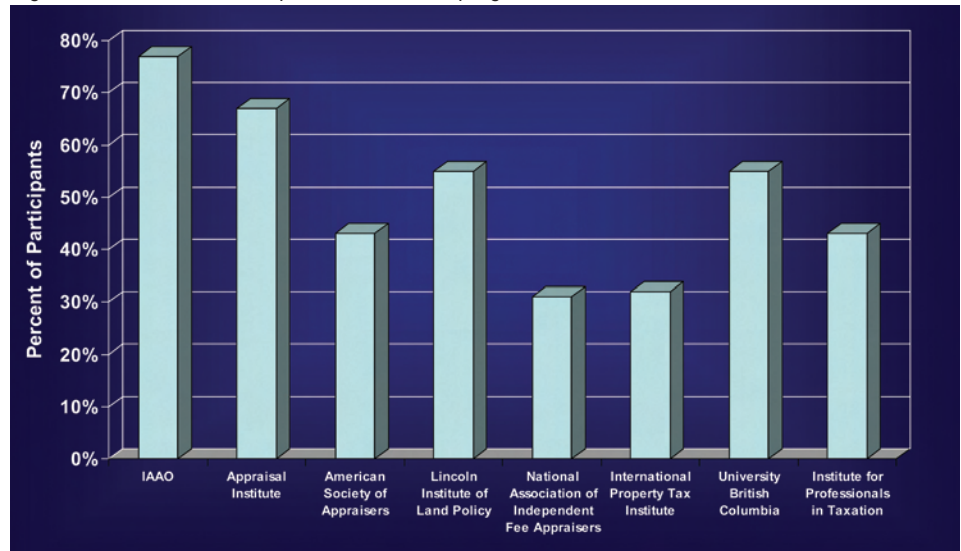


Figure 4. Satisfaction level as indicated by likelihood to renew Membership

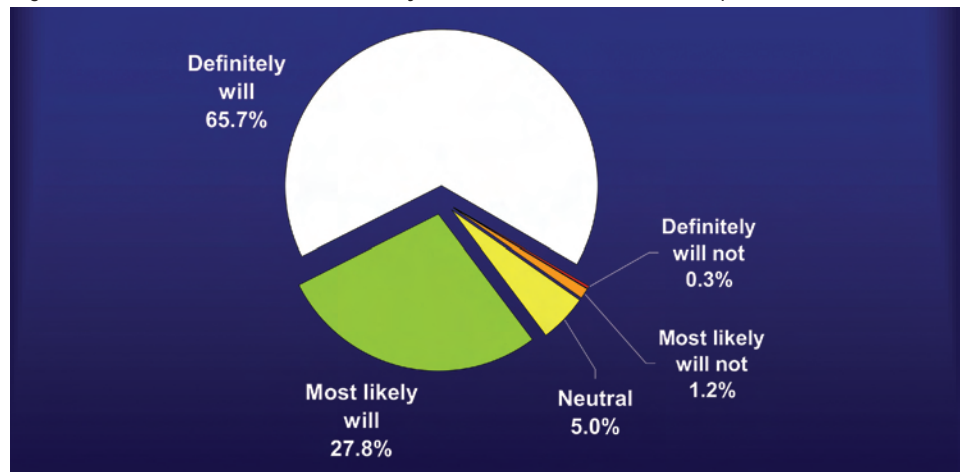


Figure 5. Satisfaction level as indicated by likelihood to recommend IAAO to a colleague

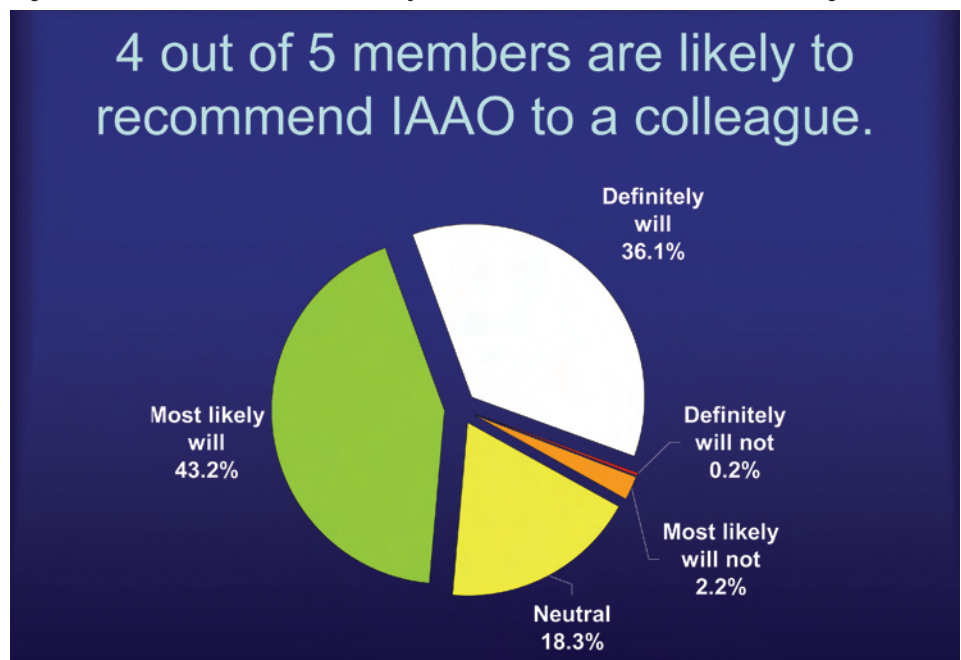




Figure 6. Number of Parcels in Jurisdiction for Members and Nonmembers

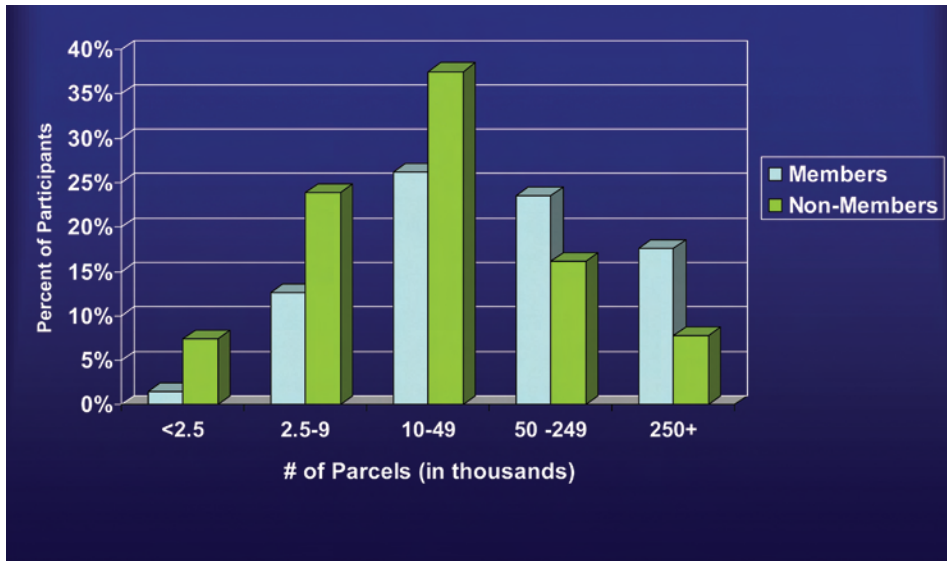


Figure 7. Office Size Based on Number of Employees

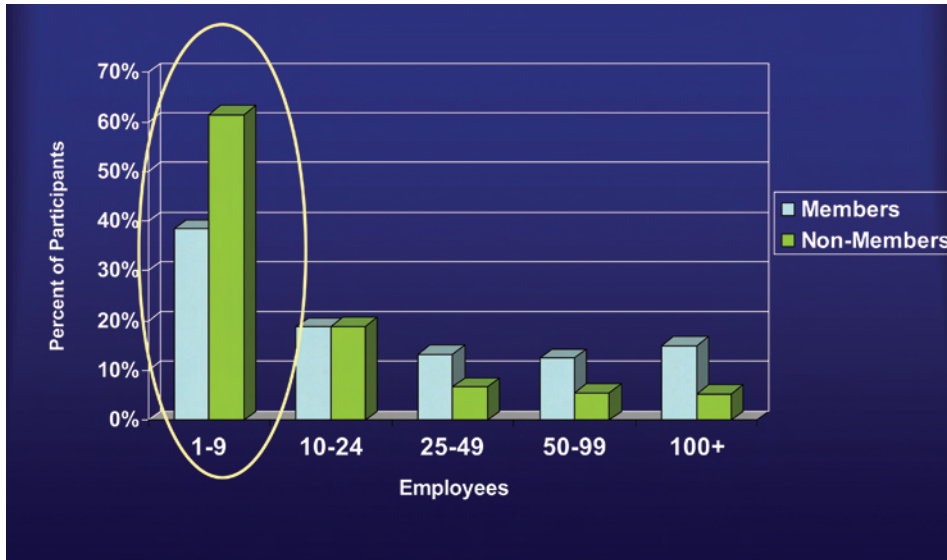
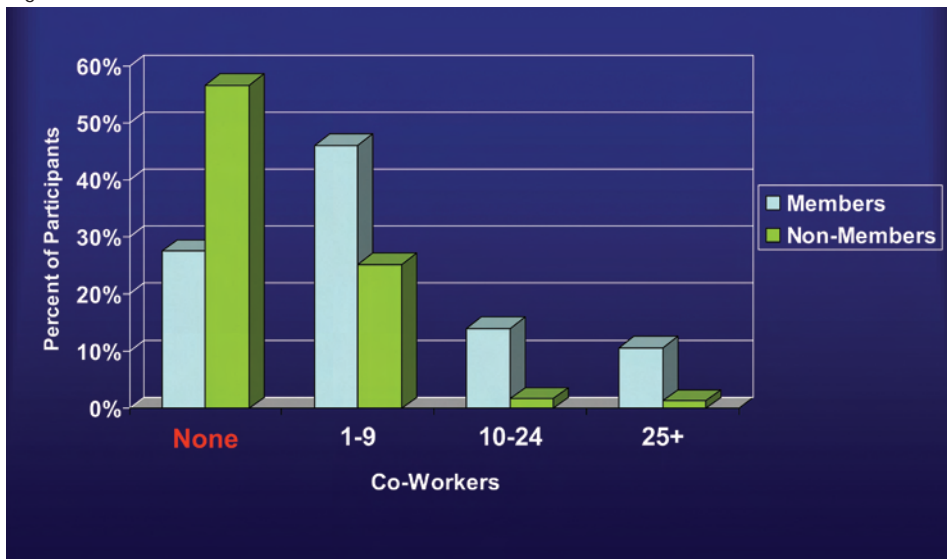


Figure 8. Number of Coworkers who are members of IAAO



## Professional Designations

A large segment of IAAO's education program is tailored to its highly valued professional designations. One third of members consider the professional designation program to be among their top benefits. IAAO strives to create designations that will support a member's professional development. A majority of members agree that designation holders represent the top professionals in the assessing/appraisal field. Based on these survey results, 26% of members hold or are a candidate for a professional designation. The motivation to obtain a professional designation is driven by the desire for professional recognition/credibility (81%), personal pride/satisfaction (73%), to gain professional knowledge (67%), and career development (57%). Fifty percent of the members who do not have designations say the reason is because they are not required to. Based on the motivational factors indicated by those obtaining designations, it appears to be a personal choice as opposed to a job requirement. One third of members believe IAAO should create more designations, and 10% of members without designations claim there is not a designation relevant to their work. IAAO will need to conduct further research if they are to develop new professional designations.

## Member Satisfaction

IAAO is willing to improve benefits to meet their members' needs. Members' satisfaction is of the utmost importance to IAAO. Figures 4 and 5 display satisfaction levels using two measurements: likelihood to renew membership and likelihood to recommend IAAO. It is evident from the data that, overall, members are satisfied with IAAO, 94% are likely to renew and 79% are likely to recommend. One of the primary goals of IAAO is to get the members who are in the "most likely will" categories into the "definitely will" categories. The members who recommend IAAO are able to help the association grow its membership by recruiting nonmembers. Respondents in the "most likely will" categories may have minor issues with IAAO products and services that can be readily addressed.

## Differences and Similarities between Members and Nonmembers

IAAO collected the same demographics from members that they collected from nonmembers in order to highlight any major differences between these two populations. It was found that on average members have been in the assessing/appraisal profession longer than nonmembers. A majority of members (56%) have been in the profession for more than 20 years compared to only 34% of nonmembers. Not only are nonmembers newer to the profession, 10% of them work part time; where as only 3% of members work part time. An obvious conclusion might be that an association membership may not be a priority for someone who works part time in the profession. Another difference between members and nonmembers is jurisdiction size based on the number of parcels. Figure 6 shows that nonmembers generally tend to be from jurisdictions with fewer parcels and members tend to be from jurisdictions with comparatively more parcels. Jurisdictions with fewer parcels are more likely to have significant limits on budgets and resources, which is consistent with the survey finding.

Figure 7 shows that both members and nonmembers are weighted heavily in smaller jurisdictions based on number of employees in the office. Understanding this demographic is extremely important. It tells us that a majority of members and nonmembers alike tend to come from relatively small offices that have significant limits on budgets and resources. In order to retain members and attract new members, IAAO must provide products and services that cater to the needs of this population, while still providing the benefits that attract employees in larger offices. The challenge is to provide new services that address the cost sensitivity of this population—a factor of major importance to survey respondents. The two most popular benefits, Education and *Fair & Equitable* (F&E), bear this out. Education is described as having the best “value for price” compared to other organizations. F&E is free to members and copies are generally circulated to nonmembers in offices that have members.

Furthermore, the data in figure 8 suggests that nonmembers do not have as many coworkers belonging to IAAO as members do. A majority of nonmembers (57%) do not work with an IAAO member and therefore do not have as great an exposure to the benefits that IAAO membership offers. In comparison, 73% of members work with another IAAO member, suggesting that “word of mouth” is an effective marketing tool. IAAO encourages members to reach out to nonmember coworkers to promote the benefits of IAAO membership. In keeping with this finding, the IAAO Member-Get-A-Member Campaign has proven to be especially successful because members directly recruit new members at a personal level. The IAAO Representatives play a key role in this process.

---

**Members indicated that their top two reasons for joining IAAO are to assist in their professional development (80%) and to access IAAO educational materials or offerings (56%).**

---

### Nonmembers

In order to recruit new members it is necessary for IAAO to learn the reasons why this population has not joined, and what benefits will entice them to join. Considering that 95% of nonmembers have heard of IAAO and 66% are well aware of IAAO or used to be members, a lack of awareness is not the reason they are not members. Specifically, nonmembers claim the number one reason why they have not joined or have discontinued their membership is “cost considerations” (55%), followed by “they already have the designations, certifications, and credentials that they need” (27%). Even though nonmembers have the ability to join local chapters without

joining IAAO, they are not taking advantage of this. Only 6% of nonmembers participate in a local chapter. The good news is 68% of nonmembers did say at least one of the “members only” benefits would entice them to join. Nonmembers find discounts on seminars and the IAAO Annual Conference (36%) and networking with other assessment professionals (35%) to be the two most desirable “members only” benefits. Taking into account these facts and the remaining valuable information gathered from the nonmember survey, IAAO can establish an understanding of their nonmember population.

### Former Members

The nonmembers that are of particular interest to IAAO are the 21% who used to be members. A detailed analysis of these former members will help IAAO learn why they discontinued their membership and which benefits would entice them to join again. Even though they discontinued membership, 32% of former members are interested in receiving additional information about becoming an IAAO member again. Based on this finding, IAAO may be able to recruit not only new members, but also, former members. One third of former members list subscriptions to the *Journal of Property Tax Assessment & Administration* and *Fair & Equitable* as a benefit that was the most valuable to them. With this finding in mind, IAAO may want to promote the current availability of paid subscriptions to nonmembers and academic institutions through their libraries. This provides an information channel to former members and nonmembers that may entice them to join in the future so they can gain increased access to other networking and education benefits.

### Members Employed at Small Offices

While it is important to highlight the differences between members and nonmembers and analyze them separately, it is also beneficial to look for similarities between these populations. Members and nonmembers are working in the same profession and therefore must have some of the same needs. IAAO can learn about nonmembers by taking a

closer look at their members with similar demographics. As mentioned previously, the survey data indicates members and nonmembers share a similar trend when it comes to office size. IAAO has learned that a large segment of their members come from small offices (see figure 7). Thirty eight percent of members are employed at these small offices, which are defined as 1–9 employees. The survey responses from this particular group of members are valuable, because 62% of IAAO's nonmembers are also employed at small offices. If IAAO can gain an understanding of how their benefits assist members employed at small offices, then they can use this newfound knowledge to market IAAO membership to the large number of nonmembers in a similar work environment.

After analyzing the results of members employed at small offices, it was found that they are a highly satisfied group of members. They also selected Education (78%) and *Fair & Equitable* magazine (61%) as the top two most important benefits; and gave them even higher quality ratings than the overall membership did. Additionally, 52% agreed that IAAO is meeting a substantial portion of their educational needs. The number one reason why members employed in small offices chose not to attend an IAAO continuing education program is they received continuing education credits elsewhere (42%). Even though a significant percentage are going elsewhere for their continuing education, they still rated IAAO's education program as the best value for the price compared to other organizations. IAAO plans to use the high satisfaction ratings of these members in marketing campaigns targeted at nonmembers employed at small offices.

## Conclusion

IAAO has already contacted all of the nonmembers who indicated on their survey that they wanted to receive information about becoming a member. Marketing campaigns are underway to promote beneficial services that members and nonmembers alike will want to know more about (see IAAO New and Improved Benefits on p. 24). Based

on the survey results, IAAO was able to identify a group of current members who have minor reservations about their IAAO membership. Using the information gathered from this survey, IAAO can learn what these members are most dissatisfied with and work to resolve the issues. One of IAAO's primary goals is to increase the satisfaction of this group. IAAO will use the survey data to benchmark satisfaction and plans to roll out a second membership survey in two years to evaluate progress.

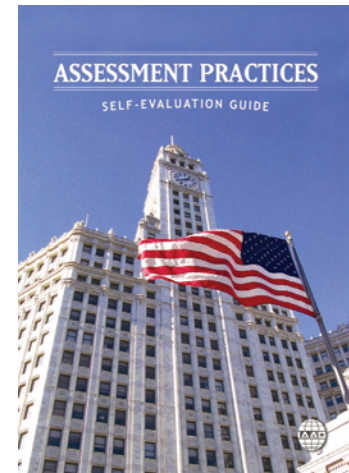
Plans were made to share the results of this important survey at Leadership Days committee meetings in late October. As of this writing, Leadership Days has not yet occurred so results of those meetings will be covered in a future issue of F&E. The Membership Services Committee will coordinate with other committees and staff to develop a comprehensive plan to act on the information that was collected. The survey information provides a valuable starting point for improving services, promoting and expanding member benefits, and attracting new members.

IAAO is very optimistic about the future of the association, and the data indicates a healthy membership satisfaction rate. As many of you know, IAAO recently completed a massive organizational change, which involved moving from Chicago to a new office in Kansas City, reshuffling of the budget, and a complete restaffing. Armed with a new set of membership data IAAO is ready to launch several new and exciting membership benefits. The stage is set for great things. ■

Formed in 2000, Veris Consulting, LLC, provides international survey and research services, forensic accounting and litigation support, outsourced internal auditing and accounting, information technology consulting and assurance services. Part of the services Veris offers to associations includes statistical programs and analysis, benchmarking surveys and needs assessments, and demographic surveys.

## ASSESSMENT PRACTICES: SELF-EVALUATION GUIDE

The second edition of *Assessment Practices: Self-Evaluation Guide* is available. The updated text expands the number of chapters covered in the first edition and updates topics to reflect changes in technology and industry standards.



The book focuses on the following topics:

- Setting, Legal Framework, Value Standard, and Assessment Cycle
- Resources and Management
- Computerization
- Mapping
- Data Collection
- Land Valuation
- Residential Property Valuation
- Commercial Property Valuation
- Sales Data, Ratio Studies, and Stratification
- Personal Property Assessment
- Assessment Administration
- Defense of Values
- Public Relations

The book has three distinct purposes: first, it serves as an essential tool for assessors and other professionals in the field who may wish to improve their office or jurisdiction by following the best practices outlined here; second, individuals seeking an Assessment Administration Specialist (AAS) designation may complete one of the requirements for the designation by doing an evaluation of his or her jurisdiction, based on the guide; finally, the document provides instructions for the new Excellence in Assessment Administration Certificate Program. The book is available for \$40 to members and \$55 to nonmembers, plus shipping and handling.