

USAIN Membership Survey 2009

Summary

This membership survey was conducted in August, 2009. The request to respond to the survey was sent via the USAIN listserv USAIN-L. One follow-up reminder was sent. The link to the survey was also forwarded on to other lists, such as AgNIC and IAALD, by USAIN members. There are approximately 160 members of USAIN, but non-members were also encouraged to respond to the survey. There were 68 responses and all respondents completed the survey.

By far most of our members are employed at academic institutions and most of the respondents have been involved in the organization for 10 or more years, while the 2nd largest group have been members for less than 5 years. Subject matter, networking opportunities, and conference programs are the top reasons why members joined USAIN.

A strong majority of the respondents said they planned to attend the conference in May 2010. The survey responses for preconference choices were forwarded to the conference planning committee and will be used in planning the upcoming conference.

The USAIN listserv seems to be a very useful tool since 98% of respondents have joined – primarily to keep informed of current awareness issues, conference communications, networking, sharing expertise and resources, help with reference and other questions and receiving updates from NAL.

PayPal does not seem to be of interest to the members especially if there is a fee involved.

The survey respondents expressed unanimous support that the three current goals in the USAIN Action Plan are still central to USAIN's expressed mission (the three goals are listed in question 8). However, some respondents shared that they were unfamiliar with USAIN's advocacy role and felt that members did not actively participate in furthering this goal.

Interest groups (IG's) of most interest to respondents were Technology Trends, Collection Management, and AgNIC. There does not seem to be a strong desire for any of the interest groups to be eliminated or combined and while the majority of respondents did not have suggestions for new IG's, the possible topics of food and sustainable agriculture and web 2.0/social networking tools were suggested more than once .

At the time of the survey, well over half of the respondents used Facebook, although not necessarily for professional activities. Half were blog readers, about a third routinely used wikis, and a small number were regular users of Twitter.

A strong majority of the membership felt that some online professional development activity was a good idea. Subject areas for professional development included scholarly communication, digital collections, social

networking, instruction techniques, leadership development, data or informatics, and NAL updates. These activities should be offered for no or minimal costs (\$0-\$50).

If members need to use the directory they are willing and able to use the online version. The majority of the membership has not needed to refer to an updated version of the directory. Members who have required current contact information were overwhelmingly in favor of having the directory available online, with just a few printing out a copy for themselves.

Members seem to be content with their current level of involvement. In these times of tight budgets, the most compelling reasons to remain a member of USAIN are networking opportunities and the conferences. Adding professional development activities would seem to strongly encourage people to remain members. Other individual responses include the low cost of membership, USAIN-L, usefulness of USAIN, commitment to the organization and the sense of community within the organization.

Details about individual questions and additional comments can be obtained in the body of this report. The overall feeling from the survey though is that although this is a small organization, the focus and community is beneficial to members. The organization does need to continue to look forward at new means of communication and benefits to its members in order to maintain and increase the membership.

Analysis by Question

Question 1: Place of Employment

By far most of our members (78%) are employed at academic institutions. We then have a smattering of members from non-profit organization (9%) and government agencies (7%). Only 3% of members are employed by Cooperative Extension. We have one public librarian in our midst (glad to have you!) and one retiree.

Question 2: How many years have you been a USAIN member?

Our largest percentage (44%) of members has been involved in the organization for 10 or more years. The 2nd largest (37%) have been members for less than 5 years, with memberships of 5-9 years makes up 18%.

Question 3: Please give reasons why you joined USAIN. Choose as many as apply:

Subject matter (94%), networking opportunities (87%), and conference programs (68%) top the list of reasons why members joined USAIN. The size of the organization (44%), communications (40%), and low membership fees (38%) were also important reasons for joining. However, the "other" category provides interesting responses ... "really nice people", "diversity of attendees", and "welcoming, interesting, hard-working members".

Question 4: The next USAIN conference is scheduled for May 9-12 in 2010 at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. Do you plan to attend?

A strong majority (78%) of the respondents said they plan to attend the conference. Only 3% said no, and the others were undecided. Not surprisingly, in the comments seven respondents said that money was an issue, and four said that timing (close to other conferences) was an issue.

Question 5: The following half-day pre-conference sessions are being considered by the 2010 Purdue USAIN conference planning committee. Please indicate which, at this time, you would be interested in attending. Choose as many as are of interest to you.

The top 3 choices were:

1. Exploring eXtension
2. Open Access
3. Data Curation

Other suggestions included Leadership & mentorship; Repositories; Database searching; Bioinformatics (3); PubMed; Assessment; Semantic Web; Outreach; and Serving the ag professional.

There were two comments about extra fees being a burden and suggesting making the preconference presentations available on the web after the conference.

Question 6: USAIN-L listserv

6a. Do you subscribe to the USAIN-L listserv?

A strong majority (98%) of respondents have joined the USAIN listserv.

6b. If you do subscribe to the USAIN-L listserv, please check all the reasons you find it useful:

Members joined primarily to keep informed of current awareness issues, conference communications, networking, sharing expertise and resources, help with reference and other questions and receiving updates from NAL. (These elements had 50%+ responses).

Question 7: PayPal

7a. If the option were available would you find it convenient to use PayPal to renew your membership? (Currently the only options are to pay by check or credit card.)

Members were pretty evenly divided as to the desirability of having PayPal as an option for renewing membership. Approximately 34% indicated they would find PayPal convenient for this purpose, 37% said "no," and 29% said "maybe."

7b. Would you use PayPal if we had to charge a small service fee for this convenience, in order to offset costs to the organization?

However, when asked if they would be willing to pay a small service fee to offset PayPal costs to USAIN, only 25% indicated "yes," 46% said "no," and 29% said "maybe." Written comments indicate that member willingness may depend on the steepness of the fee.

Question 8: The USAIN Action Plan is being revised. The 2000 Plan specified the following three goals: 1. Strengthen membership and increase participation in USAIN by members and other agricultural information professionals, 2. Advocate for public policy, legislation and institutional change that enhance the values and contributions of the agricultural research and information communities, 3. Provide educational and professional development opportunities for agricultural information professionals.

8a. Are these goals still central to USAIN's mission?

The survey respondents expressed unanimous support that the three current goals are still central to USAIN's expressed mission. However, some respondents shared that they were unfamiliar with USAIN's advocacy role and felt that members did not actively participate in furthering this goal.

8b. Are there other important goals and objectives you feel should be incorporated into a revision of the Action Plan? Please comment

It was pointed out that USAIN should more broadly address food-related issues and should play a role in facilitating collaborations among members and institutions. Other areas of concern were identified as appropriate for USAIN action and leadership, including issues related to preserving and managing agriculture-related grey literature, and specifically state extension and experiment station publications; defining an information architecture for agricultural information; helping members meet current or emerging information needs of users; and furthering open access and scholarly communication initiatives.

Question 9: Are there any special projects which you believe USAIN should support? Please specify.

For those that responded to this question the overwhelming answer was preservation/digitization projects.

Question 10: Currently, USAIN has Interest Groups in a number of areas for its members to more closely interact and discuss common issues and to help plan conference programs.

10a. Please indicate the groups that interest you:

Interest groups of most interest to respondents were Technology Trends (65%), Collection Management (55%), and AgNIC (49%). A smaller number of respondents were interested in Animal Health Information (34%) and International Agriculture (34%). The Social Issues/Rural Information IG held the least interest (26%).

10b. In your opinion, are there interest groups which should be combined or eliminated?

There does not seem to be a strong desire for any of the interest groups to be eliminated or combined; however there were several comments that the Social Issues IG was either unknown or of less interest. A few other comments indicated that if an IG was without good participation, it should be eliminated.

10c. Do you have suggestions for NEW Interest Groups?

The majority of respondents did not have suggestions for new IG's, but a few items mentioned more than once included food and sustainable agriculture and web 2.0/social networking tools.

Question 11: Which of the following technologies do you use/access routinely to communicate or keep up to date?

At the time of the survey, well over half of the respondents used Facebook, although not necessarily for professional activities. Half were blog readers, about a third routinely used wikis, and a small number were regular users of Twitter.

Question 12: The USAIN Executive Committee is considering adding some ONLINE professional development activities for the membership. These activities would likely be offered during the off-conference years.

12a. Do you think this is a wise idea?

Almost 80% (53 of 67) of responses said yes. Members suggested that with tight budgets, webinars might be a good delivery method, and several people mentioned the wisdom of trying to coordinate with AgNIC or other groups who are doing similar activities.

12b. Please check off the types of activities which would interest you:

Member-led webinar on topics of interest (90%), webinar from vendor (68.8%), but not sales presentations were the highest rated. A few of the individual comments suggested NAL updates, wiki or similar tools where members can post information/resources on successful projects.

12c. What professional development topics are you most interested in?

There were many suggestions for types of programs, ideas of ways to collaborate with AgNIC and the Webinars AgNIC is currently providing, plus other remarks.

Suggested topics for professional development sessions included: scholarly communication, digital collections, social networking/ web 2.0, instruction techniques, leadership development, data or informatics, NAL updates, animal health, food safety, sustainable agriculture, mentorship, open access, evidence-based agricultural librarianship, creating digital collections, and Cooperative Extension.

12d. Would you be interested in organizing a professional development session

People were interested in attending professional development sessions, but not organizing them (85% said no, 15% said yes).

12e. How much (if anything) would you be willing to pay to participate in professional development activities?

Cost was clearly an issue, with a number of members stating that they hoped at least some of the webinars would be free of charge. Others commented that perhaps sessions given by members might be free, but a small amount could be charged if an outside person was recruited to give a session. More than one person suggested that a small increase in dues might be a way to cover the expenses of web-based professional development.

42% felt they should be offered at no additional cost and 53% said \$25-50. Many comments suggested members would be willing to have a dues increase to cover the cost of these opportunities.

Question 13: In 2009, the USAIN Directory became "virtual", available as an online PDF to members. Not only did this save money, but it can now be updated more than once a year. How would you describe your usage of the directory?

Most (56%) of the 68 who responded to this question have not needed to refer to an updated version of the USAIN directory. But of those who have, most (23 of 68) use it online as needed, with only a few (5 of 68) taking the effort to print out a copy for themselves. Only one person expressed a desire to have the directory mailed to them.

Question 14: Would you be interested in serving on a USAIN Committee?

It was obvious from the comments to this question, that this was a poorly worded question. 45% of respondents said yes, they were interested in serving on a committee while 55% said no. What we didn't ask was if you were currently serving on a committee. Probably a better way to word this question may have been "if you are not currently serving on a USAIN committee, would you be interested in doing so?"

Question 15: Are there other ways you would like to be more involved in USAIN? Please comment.

Members seemed to be content with the current avenues for involvement in USAIN.

Question 16: As budgets get tighter, what elements of USAIN will encourage you to remain a member?

The most compelling reasons to remain a member are the networking opportunities (88%) and conferences (80%). Additional activities such as professional development, was also a strong response (57%). Other individual responses included the low cost of membership, USAIN-L, usefulness of USAIN, commitment to the organization and the sense of community within the organization. One respondent would be encouraged to remain a member if USAIN can support/initiate coordinated efforts to collectively manage ag and food information.

Question 17: Additional comments?

There were about a dozen additional comments and a few of those comments are highlighted here. Several respondents expressed satisfaction with USAIN and found it to be valuable and the conferences quite good. One respondent felt that USAIN and AgNIC were too territorial and needed to be better joined. One respondent would like the membership directory to include academic rank of members for use in tenure/promotion support (note: this was implemented this year). One respondent said that the support of NAL and non-profits was important to the organization. And lastly, it was suggested that USAIN “Do more to get new members integrated” and that we need to “focus on recruiting and maintaining new members and getting them included.”

If you have questions about the survey, please contact any of the members of the USAIN Executive Council.