

Dec. 13, 2018

BENEFITS, DESIRES AND VALUES OF ORURISA MEMBERS, AND ASSOCIATED COSTS OF TRAINING

Introduction. What do the members of the Oregon-SW Washington Urban and Regional Information Systems Association want or expect with membership? The ORURISA board of directors seeks to inform that question using data collected in a pair of membership surveys in 2018. The surveys explored members' training needs and the values and benefits they desired with ORURISA membership. The board anticipates using results from the surveys to help inform questions about membership, outreach, and organizational growth.

Background. ORURISA was founded in 1992 as a forum for geographic information systems (GIS) professionals and students to meet, share ideas and discuss local issues. Local users' groups and special interest groups are at the core of ORURISA's structure. Users' group meetings provide opportunities for professional and social networking and to share news of innovations and technological developments. Users' group meetings are opportunities for training and education. In rural areas, they may be the only opportunities for professional networking and training.

The chapter is administered by a board of directors who represent the local users' groups (sections), special interest groups, and the membership at large. In 2018 the board surveyed the chapter to better understand what benefits, services and values members realize from their association with ORURISA. Survey 1 (S1) – 151 respondents; September 2018 – explored members' training and education needs. Survey 2 (S2) – 98 respondents; November 2018 – explored members' understandings and expectations about membership benefits. It also asked their thoughts about elements of a proposal—OneURISA—to change the formal relationship between the local chapter and URISA. Should the chapter adopt OneURISA as a model for membership, some aspects of the local and international organizations would merge, including institution of a uniform dues covering membership in both groups.

The final survey is under development. It will explore members' interests in opportunities to increase their involvement in ORURISA and thereby increase the value of ORURISA membership.

Dec. 13, 2018

Desired benefits, services and values. For most respondents¹, the value of ORURISA membership lies in the organization's ability to convene GIS users for information sharing, professional and social networking, and training. More than 90 percent of respondents to S1, Question 1 (s1-q1) said they needed training to improve their GIS skills. In S2 (s2-q3), nearly three quarters described their membership in ORURISA as "somewhat," "very," or "extremely" valuable. Repeatedly in S2 networking, professional development, training and education were called out as values of membership. Asked to name the chief value of membership (s2-q4), respondents cited conferences and section meetings, networking (locally, nationally, internationally), finding and sharing relevant GIS information, seeing what others are doing, keeping up to date with technology and apps, access to no-cost or low-cost training and education, and free membership. Asked what one thing would increase the value of their membership (s2-q5), respondents cited ORURISA's ability to bring GIS users together for training, information sharing and professional development. Rural users would like more opportunities for training and networking in rural areas. Several suggested moving GIS In Action around the state to address this. Respondents also appreciate (and would like more) opportunities for social engagement, mentoring, advocacy, learning about statewide developments affecting GIS and GIS users, and having regional forums for discussing important issues.

Asked what would increase the value of their membership (s2-q5) respondents focused on networking and outreach: Planning more events and activities, keeping members informed of events and activities, providing more training – online and off, holding more events around the state, introducing board members at ORURISA events and activities, and generally providing more information and activities for the members. Comments included, "More inclusivity. As a volunteer organization, I understand that some people are the 'doers' and dedicate themselves to the association. Sometimes, the doers become insular/cliq-ue-like and control the group in a detrimental fashion." "More things going on - it doesn't seem that ORURISA has had too many opportunities other than GIS In Action over the last few years," and, "Knowing about events, publications, meetings, etc. Aside from the surveys in the last few months, I have heard nearly nothing about/from ORURISA."

Do members value OneURISA? For this review information has been selected from the findings of the two surveys and used to answer specific questions that the board is asking about the benefits, desires and values espoused by members. The intent is neither to present a balanced view of complex issues or

¹ ORURISA maintains an email list of about 1500, but active membership is estimated to be much lower. Since the actual active membership is unknown, the response rate to the surveys cannot be determined.

Dec. 13, 2018

build a case for one point of view over another, but to try to make some sense of values and desires that might not be clear to see, except by their holders. ORURISA members value their local chapter. But if the audience that responded to the survey is a fair sampling of active ORURISA membership, then a significant proportion of members (at least of respondents to S2) are conflicted by the OneURISA proposal.

Asked (s2-q8) if they have comments or questions about the proposal, 80 percent of respondents said, “No,” but 19 respondents offered comments ranging from, “This is a good direction to be taking,” to “Don’t do it.” Of the comments, nine were opposed, seven were primarily concerned with the cost, and two were favorable. When asked (s2-q10) how a change would affect their local chapter membership or dues, 70 percent of respondents declined to answer directly, but 23 provided comments. A sampling includes: “If I can’t ‘pay up,’ when are you going to drop me as a member?” “Please keep dues as low as possible,” “I don’t think this will have much difference for ORURISA members” and “I have another professional organization that is more meaningful to me.” Eleven of 23 comments expressed doubt about or opposition to the change, or reticence to an increase in dues. The respondents generally questioned the benefits of OneURISA or had difficulty understanding how OneURISA would benefit the local chapter.

Training and associated costs. Training workshops are integral to GIS In Action. Symposium By the Sea provides training with emphasis on coastal management for GIS users and new audiences. Training often occurs at users’ group meetings depending on the levels of interest, energy, and commitment of the members. ORURISA provides an annual stipend to user groups to cover the costs of user group meetings. (Needed or preferred training topics are described in S1’s findings and are not repeated here.)

Half of the S1 respondents were willing to pay up to \$250, and nearly half were willing travel up to 75 miles, to attend training (s1-q2). Sixty percent identified full-day workshops as their preferred format (s1-q4). Some were willing to pay more for “highly relevant” training. Multi-day trainings were less favorable, so were online formats (s1-q4). However in both surveys respondents said there was value in online training especially for rural offices and agencies. GIS users working in rural areas cited limited travel and training budgets, and their work needs didn’t always align with available training content. Since in-office training can be interrupted or delayed by work, training away from the office was preferred; but to travel for training in Oregon is difficult, time consuming, and may require overnight stays. All of these can be barriers to training. Forty two percent of S1 respondents denied having participated in ORURISA-sponsored training.

Dec. 13, 2018

The following is a summary of suggestions, from S2, to help increase the value of ORURISA membership:

- Sponsor training sessions that are hosted by other groups, occur online or on location, or are scheduled in conjunction with other events.
- Move ORURISA events (GIS In Action) around the state to make them more accessible to rural members. Provide adequate notice. Short notice events are difficult to get approved for travel associated costs.
- Provide training for older workers transitioning to GIS (for example, after starting as a geographer); continue reaching out to young professionals and students.
- Keep members informed. Publish an online calendar to provide better notice of upcoming conferences, training and other activities. Make sure members are aware of resources and opportunities that ORURISA provides.
- Increase involvement with national or other chapters. ORURISA is too isolated.
- Encourage and support networking.
- The most persuasive incentive to attend training is low or no cost. Short, focus[ed], low cost training is preferable.
- Reduced training costs can be achieved in some cases by tapping members as volunteer instructors.
- Good volunteer instructors provide outstanding value and should be compensated for their time and/or travel costs.

The Coastal Training Program (CTP) at the South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, in Charleston, works with ORURISA and SCUG to identify and address geospatial training needs. The CTP's mission is to increase the use of science-based information by coastal decision makers. Because of their comprehensive role in informing coastal management decisions with maps and data, GIS users are an important audience for coastal training. The CTP coordinator also coordinates the SCUG meetings and facilitates the Symposium By the Sea to provide GIS training. The CTP also works with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management – Digital Coast training center to provide training. The CTP occasionally circulates notices of training offered by federal agencies to SCUG members but could work more closely with the ORURISA board to provide notice of these opportunities to other members and sections, as appropriate.