

# Ideas abound at 2023 BIG10 Retirees' Association conference

by Larry Dlugosh

*ERA president-elect Larry Dlugosh represented UNL at the BIG10 Retirees Associations' annual conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in July and submitted this report.*



Larry Dlugosh

Representatives of 13 of the 14 BIG10 Retirees Associations gathered in Madison, Wis., this summer to share ideas about programming, membership engagement, finance, communications and other topics.

The UW-M Retirees Association planned an excellent agenda with a variety of presentations by faculty and friends of the university. The presentations centered on the Wisconsin Idea, formulated in 1904. This public philosophy put forward the concept that education should influence people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Presenters said it is a philosophy that is alive and well at UW-M.

A slate of round-table discussions allowed attendees to compare and contrast the similarities and differences among the various associations, and the dialogue provided new ideas for everyone.

The following bullet points serve as a synopsis of issues covered:

## Major issues

- The recruitment, retention and engagement of members – the Number One issue
- Programming that appeals to all members and the delivery of programs to members
- How to finance retirement associations (dues only, dues and donations, university support)
- Understanding the needs of retirees and how to address those needs
- Communications (online, newsletter delivery, regular phone calls or e-mails to members)
- Understanding the mission of a retirement association and addressing that mission so all members are served
- The connection of the retirees' association to the university, which varies among member schools from direct support to little or no direct support
- Life after the pandemic and the return to face-to-face and hybrid meetings

## Membership

- The number of members ranges from 650 (Northwestern) to 5,700 (Michigan State).
- About half of the universities have retiree associations for emeriti only and a separate association for all other university employees.
- Engagement by members in association activities ranges from 5% to 20%.
- Eligibility for membership varies from age 62 (even if working) to actual retirement date.



**The Big 10 Retirees Association conference participants gather and share ideas about programming, membership engagement and many other topics.**



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## University involvement

- The University of Iowa provides a .25 FTE administrative assistant to the retirees' association.
- Purdue University offers insurance benefits to retirees and spouses of association members.
- Seven of the Big10 universities have formal relationships with their institutions through memoranda of understanding; many of those universities provide office space or administrative assistants.
- The primary liaison for 12 of the Big 10 universities is centered in the Provost's Office or the Human Resources Division. Nebraska, Wisconsin and Northwestern do not have a named university liaison.

## Communications

- Newsletters serve as the primary method to distribute news about the association to members. The distribution ranges from twice a year to 12 times per year. Almost all associations are migrating to online only delivery. Some associations send regular e-mail updates for members.

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## Finances

- Dues are the primary source of financial support followed by donations and contributions. (At Michigan, 16 businesses pay a \$600 annual fee to the retirees association for access to membership meetings. The agencies include financial planners, insurance carriers and retirement communities.
- Dues range from \$25 to \$45 per year. Maryland suggests a \$50 annual donation in lieu of dues, but they are moving toward a dues structure.
- Annual operating budgets range from \$5,000 to \$63,000. (Nebraska's operating budget is \$17,000.)

## Meetings/events

- All of the associations hold luncheon meetings with speakers eight to 12 times per year plus many special interest group meetings and coffees. Minnesota offers a “Cabinets of Curiosity” opportunity where members visit seldom-viewed laboratories, historic sites, museums, etc. It sounded similar to some of our visits such as the Back Stage at the Lied Center tour.
- ERA Nebraska is the only association that offers joint programs with OLLI. (Most associations said they are eager to explore such a relationship.)
- Twelve of the associations hold an annual membership meeting for the purpose of electing officers, examining bylaws and conducting a business meeting.
- Six of the associations said annual picnics are an increasingly popular activity.

The 2023 gathering was the first for the University of Maryland. Rutgers did not attend. Future members include UCLA and USC, both of whom have asked for membership once the Big 10 approves their admission to the conference.

In July of 2024, The Ohio State University will host the annual retirees' associations meeting in Columbus, Ohio. An online meeting of Big 10 Retirees Associations is scheduled for February of 2024.