

**2004 AVA SURVEY
OF CLUB PRESIDENTS
STATE PRESIDENTS AND
NEC OFFICERS**

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AVA SURVEY OF CLUB/STATE PRESIDENTS/NEC OFFICERS

In June 2004, the American Volkssport Association, (AVA) sent a national survey to AVA club presidents, state presidents and National Executive Council (NEC) Officers. The survey consisted of 66 questions related to all aspects of volkssporting in the United States. Many club presidents consulted their membership and/or club records. Statistics for responses are below.

Table 1: Response Rates

Category	Surveys Sent	Surveys Returned	Response Rate
AVA Clubs	367	207	56.4%
State President	13	11	84.6%
NEC Officers/ED	15	13	86.7%
Total	395	225	58.5%

The survey results are dependable. Based upon the size of the survey and the number of responses, if AVA conducted this survey 100 times, 95 times out of 100 should produce results within +/- 4.6% of the results included in this report.

I. OUR CLUB PRESIDENTS

The first question asked each respondent who was an AVA club president how long they have held their office. Fractional years were rounded to the next higher year. Table 2 shows a distribution by Region. Note that 40 percent of AVA club president have been in office less than two years.

Table 2. Years Served by AVA Presidents

Region	0-2 years	3-6 years	7-10 years	11-16 years	Over 17 years	Total reporting
Atlantic	13	9	2	1	3	28
Northeast	3	3	1	1	0	8
Southeast	8	6	4	0	0	18
South Central	4	2	5	0	2	13
Mid-America	8	13	6	5	1	33
North Central	7	9	5	0	1	22
Rocky	6	1	6	1	1	15
South West	6	7	2	4	0	19
Pacific	11	4	3	0	1	19
North West	17	8	3	6	0	34
TOTAL	83	62	37	18	9	209

Respondents were asked why they participate in volkssporting. Each response choice was selected by over 85% of the respondents. In order of importance, responses were: exercise, health, enjoyment of the outdoors, friendship and travel. When asked to describe the participants seen at volkssporting events, 62% indicated that the majority of participants are seniors, while 39% indicated 'a variety of ages'.

II. CLUB HEALTH

Club Health includes growth and composition of AVA club membership. This section shows responses related to each club's financial health, whether the club is growing or shrinking and the number of club members in each of the following categories.

Number of members in club.

Number of members in club one year ago.

Average age of members.

Number of members under the age of 21.

Number of club members who are in their first two years of volkssporting.

Number of members who are also AVA Associate Members.

A. Club Membership. Total membership declined from 2003 to 2004, but only by -0.43%, or 52 members. Table 3 below shows that five AVA Regions increased in membership (North Central, Pacific, Mid-America, North West, and Rocky Mountain) while five decreased (South West, South East, South Central, Atlantic and North East). If one assumes that non-responding clubs have the same average membership as responding clubs, nationwide club membership is about 21,250. AVA Volkssport Associate membership (per the AVA Executive Director) has declined much faster in the last 12 months than total AVA membership (10.6 % vs. 0.43 %).

Table 3: Club Membership

Region	Current Members	Members 1 year ago	Percent Change In Members
Atlantic	2,198	2,259	-2.7%
North East	927	951	-2.5%
South East	1,119	1,188	-5.8%
South Central	428	453	-5.5%
Mid-America	1,421	1,388	2.4%
North Central	956	897	6.6%
Rocky Mountain	712	706	0.9%
South West	1,399	1,487	-5.9%
Pacific	1,158	1,102	5.1%
North West	1,572	1,546	1.7%
Total USA	11,925	11,977	-0.43%

B. Composition of AVA Clubs. Table 4 shows club composition. Average age of members is relatively consistent nationally, from high forties to mid-fifties, perhaps an understatement as those 60+ were treated as 60 during tabulation.

Members below age 21 represent roughly 4% of the total. The percentage of members in their first two years of volkssporting (14.5%) is encouraging, but both statistics are one-time measurements. AVA should continue to gather this information to develop meaningful trend data.

Table 4: Club Composition

Region	Average Age of Members	Percentage of Club Members below age 21	Members in First Two years of Volkssporting	Members Who are AVA Associate Members
Atlantic	45	5.7%	12.7%	11.0%
North East	53	1.2%	9.3%	19.5%
South East	56	3.7%	13.1%	12.4%
South Central	58	4.7%	10.1%	30.9%
Mid-America	55	1.4%	9.5%	21.4%
North Central	53	9.9%	18.3%	18.4%
Rocky Mountain	57	2.8%	9.5%	11.6%
South West	51	3.3%	20.3%	19.0%
Pacific	56	4.6%	20.5%	21.2%
North West	55	4.9%	17.8%	14.7%
Total USA	54.1	4.1%	14.5%	16.4%

C. Perceptions of Growth. The survey asked whether each club is growing, maintaining its size or decreasing in size. Table 5 below shows responses by region. Nationwide, only 21% of the club president said that their club was decreasing in size. Seventy-nine percent felt that their club was either maintaining size (60%) or growing (19%). This is consistent with the relative stability in measurement noted in section A above.

Table 5: Club Growth

Region	Increasing in size	Maintaining Its size	Decreasing in size
Atlantic	2	18	6
North East	3	3	3
South East	0	13	4
South Central	3	4	6
Mid America	6	22	7
North Central	3	16	1
Rocky	2	12	1
South West	2	11	5
Pacific	7	8	5
North West	10	18	6
Total USA	38	125	44

D. Financial Health. Other survey questions pertained to club health indicators. They were:

- Is your club prevented by a lack of funds from doing any volkssporting activities?
- Is your club more financially healthy than one year ago, less financially healthy than one year ago or about the same?

Ninety percent of AVA clubs do not feel finances prevent them from conducting volkssporting activities. Fewer than 10% felt that lack of funds does prevent their club from conducting volkssporting activities.

Table 6 below shows whether the club president feels the club is more financially healthy than one year ago (27%), less financially healthy than one year ago (12%), or about the same (61). Note that presidents who say their club is MORE financially healthy outweigh those who say their club is LESS financially healthy by a margin over 2 to 1.

Table 6: Club Financial Health

Region	More Financially Healthy	Less Financially Healthy	About The Same
Atlantic	4	5	17
North East	1	2	6
South East	4	2	11
South Central	3	5	5
Mid America	10	2	23
North Central	8	1	11
Rocky	3	2	10
South West	6	1	11
Pacific	9	2	9
North West	9	2	23
Total USA	57	24	126

E. Club Activities. Several survey questions pertained to club activities. When asked whether his/her club has monthly meetings, a newsletter, an email address and a web site, club presidents responded as below.

Does your club have:

- monthly meetings: Yes 50% (117 AVA clubs).
- a newsletter: Yes 53% (124 AVA clubs).
- an email address: Yes 55% (129 AVA clubs).
- a website: Yes 43% (102 AVA clubs).

The next set of questions pertained to the frequency of club meetings and whether those meetings included programs or walks in addition to club business. Most clubs hold regular meetings, with seven being the average number of meetings held in the last twelve months. However, 35 clubs held three or fewer club meetings in the last twelve months and 20 clubs held no meetings at all.

Among clubs that had at least one program as part of a club meeting in the last year, 26 clubs had four or more programs in the last twelve months. Sixty-two percent held no programs in the last twelve months. Twenty-four clubs had at least four meetings with walks during the previous twelve months. One hundred thirteen clubs (55%) had no walks with meetings.

III. MAKING VOLKSSPORTS FUN

The AVA Survey asked what clubs do to make volkssporting more fun for members.

Food. The largest response indicates that food is the Fourth “F” in volkssporting. Thirty-four (34) percent of clubs used food as a way to make volkssporting more fun: food at regular events, food at club group walks, picnics, potlucks, holiday parties, barbeques, breakfast, lunch and dinner – all were included.

Group walks. The next highest response category, with 26% of clubs responding, was group walks or “friendship walks” as one club called them. Club members most often get together to walk their own year-round events but they also walked shorter neighborhood walks and traveled as a group to other clubs’ year-rounds and regular events. When specifically asked if they set a schedule for members to get together to walk their club’s own YRE/seasonal walks 61% (125 clubs) indicated that they did so.

Quality events. Eighteen percent say that providing a quality event increases fun for everyone. These clubs made an extra effort to make their event walks stand out. Revising routes, providing food or music and having door prizes or treasure hunts were popular choices. Doing something innovative along the trail such as trail poker or marking local flora was also mentioned.

Incentives for Members. A smaller number of clubs, 11%, focus on activities for members. Awards for completing all club year-round events, giveaways, door prizes, discounts and guest speakers at meetings are included. Other actions mentioned included reminder emails to members, organizing club meetings to minimize club business and increase social interaction.

Road trips and carpooling. Eleven percent of clubs also listed road trips to do group walks. Some times they carpooled, sometimes they road trains or buses. When specifically asked if club members attended other club’s walks as a group, 52% (108 clubs) said they did so.

For a more detailed listing of responses, see Appendix 1.

IV. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Problems. Respondents were asked to identify the single biggest problem facing their club, and the solution to that problem. The survey offered the following choices for the biggest problem. The number following each choice is the number of times that choice was selected.

In your opinion, what is the biggest problem facing your club?

Not enough volunteers. (62)

We can't fill vacant officer positions. (45)

Not enough members. (43)

Most of our members have stopped walking due to age or illness. (35)

Competition for routes from other clubs. (8)

Too little money. (5)

Other

The reader should note that problems identified the most are related to internal club issues. Only five respondents cited money as an issue. The recurring theme is that clubs do not have enough active members who are willing to volunteer and guide their club. Thirty-five responses identified that members are aging and have stopped walking. This could also indicate that the club does not recruit new members to replace those who leave the club.

Responses under ‘Other’ were numerous, but continued the same theme of: volunteers and officer positions, recruiting new members, decreased participation in events, lack of publicity, competition from other events and a number of other miscellaneous problems. See Appendix 2 for the detailed list.

Solutions. Respondents were asked to check as many of the solution choices as applied.

We need more members. (79)

We need better publicity. (68)
I don't know. (40)
We need help to hold events. (21)
We need to join with a nearby club. (9)
We need financial help.(7)
We need training. (6)
We need guidance from AVA. (5)
We need guidance from our State organization. (4)
Other

The 'Other' category contains fewer solutions than the Problem category above. The most common responses indicated the need for recruiting new members, finding the right officers and volunteers. Two clubs indicated that they needed help from neighbor clubs to hold events. Appendix 2 has the detailed list.

V. EVENTS

A. Average Number of Events Held by Clubs. Several questions addressed the number of club events held and how often event routes were revised. The average annual number of events for those who responded is 3.95 regular (traditional) events and five year-round/seasonal events during 2004. The overwhelming majority of those events were walks. Respondents identified other volkssporting events as follows.

Swim: (13)
Bike: (32)
Cross-country ski: (4)
Snow shoe: (3)
Roller skating/blading: (0)

B. Revising Event Routes. The frequency of revision of traditional event routes (not year-round/seasonal events) is below. The majority of AVA clubs, 86%, revise traditional event routes every year. Three percent of clubs report that they never revise these routes and 14% of the clubs (25) have no schedule to revise routes.

Revised every walk: 111 clubs, 63%
Revised every other year: 28 clubs, 16%.
Revised every three years: 12 clubs, 7%.
Never revised: 5 clubs, 3%.
Only when we have to: 12 clubs, 7%.
Revised only when someone volunteers to check the route: 7 clubs, 4%.
Revised only when the walk loses money or fails to break even: 1 club, <1%

The frequency of revision of year-round/seasonal events is below. The average frequency of revision for year-round/seasonal routes is every two to three years. Fifty-five percent of clubs revise routes at least every three years, but 10% of clubs report that they never revise these routes and 45% of the clubs (77) have no schedule to revise routes.

Revised every year: 23 clubs, 13.4%.
Revised every two years: 46 clubs, 26.8%

- Revised every three years: 26 clubs, 15%
- Never revised: 18 clubs, 10.5%
- Revised only when the walk loses money or fails to break even: 5 clubs, 3%
- Revised only when we have to: 35 clubs, 20%
- Revised only if someone volunteers to do it: 19 clubs, 11%

C. Event Publicity. Clubs were asked to identify how their volkssport events are publicized. In priority order, the responses were (number of clubs responding in parenthesis):

- Flyers sent to other clubs (153, 74%)
- List them on our website. (121, 58%)
- List them in the club newsletter. (119, 58%)
- Newspaper announcements (108, 52%)
- List them in the State or regional publications. (98, 47%)
- Flyers posted in local businesses (92, 44%)
- Newspaper articles (other than *The American Wanderer*) (89, 43%)
- Write articles for *The American Wanderer* (66, 32%)
- Radio (26, 12%)

A majority of clubs keep the volkssporting community informed about events through flyers or club websites. The choices indicate that clubs focus their publicity more through volkssporting channels, (club flyers, club newsletters, state/regional publications and TAW), than to the public (website, newspapers other than TAW, flyers in local businesses and radio).

D. Opinion of Number of Volkssport Events in My Own State. Respondents’ opinions as to the number of regular walking events and year-round/seasonal events in their own state appear in Table 7. The results show that nearly three-quarters of respondents are satisfied with the number of both traditional and YR/Seasonal events in their state. A quarter of clubs felt that there should be more traditional events (24%) and some (17%) felt that there were too many YR/Seasonal events in their state.

Table 7. Opinion of Number of Volkssport Events in My Own State

Opinion	Traditional events /# clubs	Traditional Percent	YR/Seasonal events / # clubs	YR/Seasonal Percent
Not enough	50	24%	22	10%
Too many	9	4%	35	17%
About right	150	72%	151	73%

VI. STATE ORGANIZATIONS

A. Evaluation of Performance. There are 13 state organizations in AVA. Their duties are listed in AVA’s Bylaws. Respondents who had an organization in their state were asked to rate the state organizations performance. The numbers shown in Table 8 are on a scale of 1 – 10, 10 being excellent. We did not calculate average scores for state organizations because the evaluation is but a means to identify successes and areas for improvement.

Table 8. Evaluation of State Organizations by Their Constituent Clubs

STATE DUTIES PER AVA BYLAWS	CA	FL	IL	IN	MD	MN	NC	OH	OR	PA	TX	VA	WA
Promote the programs of AVA	8.5	8.8	7.5	7.7	6.8	5.2	5.8	7.8	7.9	6.7	6.4	6.6	4.8
Maintain liaison between members and the RD, NEC and AVA HQ	8.3	8.5	8.0	7.3	7.6	6.3	8.0	8.0	8.1	8.5	6.1	7.5	4.5
Review applications from prospective members (clubs) and recommend action to the RD	8.4	7.5	7.0	7.9	7.5	6.3	2.0	8.4	7.6	10.0	6.1	7.5	3.4
With RD, approve Volkssport events within the State.	9.0	8.8	9.0	8.8	7.5	8.2	8.2	8.9	7.1	9.0	7.7	7.6	5.0
Review financial reports and follow-up to assure that all debts owed to AVA are paid	8.5	8.2	8.7	7.9	9.0	7.3	8.3	8.7	7.9	9.3	7.0	8.0	6.0
Implement disciplinary action against members for violations of AVA or IVV rules	8.0	5.0	5.0	4.4	7.3	4.5	7.0	7.8	5.2	6.0	4.9	4.4	3.0
Promote development of new members (and clubs) by visiting, corresponding with and making presentations to interested groups	6.8	7.5	7.3	6.6	4.2	4.2	6.3	7.3	7.7	6.8	5.4	5.8	3.4
Develop programs, with AVA assistance, for the mutual benefit of all parties	6.6	8.0	5.0	6.0	5.4	3.7	6.0	6.8	7.8	8.0	4.9	5.8	5.3
Identify and assist 'troubled' clubs	7.1	7.8	3.7	6.3	5.5	3.8	5.2	7.5	7.1	6.7	5.5	5.0	4.2
Effectiveness of the state publication	9.3	7.5	5.0	7.8	5.5	4.8	3.7	8.1	9.0	9.0	5.2	5.3	8.8
Promote local partnerships and sponsorships	6.8	6.6	5.8	5.7	5.2	3.6	4.0	7.0	7.3	9.0	5.9	5.2	4.1

In general, the evaluation reveals that state organizations are rated most effective in administrative functions, approving volkssport events, assuring the debts to AVA are paid and communication between levels of AVA and volkssporters through the state publication. Duties rated least effective are primarily promotional in nature, e.g. promoting new members and clubs, promotion of local partnerships and sponsorships and developing new programs. Other areas for improvement include identifying and assisting troubled clubs and taking disciplinary action for violations of AVA or IVV rules.

In addition to the evaluation of duties in Table 8, a number of fill-in questions pertained to State Organizations. The State-by-State summary of comments is located at Appendix 3 with responses from members clubs in that State only. The combined summary is at Appendix 4.

B. State Organization Publications. Responders gave their opinions of publications produced by their State Organization (where applicable). A summary of best and least-liked features is below. Appendix 3, Questions 27 and 28 shows detailed responses.

1. Best. Lists Event Information. (37 responses)

Everything (6)

Year-Round information (5)

Events and YREs in other nearby states (3)

Club news and articles (3)

Has all the flyers of all the events in one place so flyers don't get lost (3)

Informative and dependable (2)

2. Least. Nothing (23 responses)

Content (16)
Arrives Late (5)
Limited Distribution (3)
Frequency of publication (2)

C. Most Important Task. One question asked respondents to identify the most important task that their State Organization performs to benefit their club. The top four answers, shown below, indicate that coordination and publicizing volkssporting events is the most important (although not the only) task according to clubs. See Appendix 3: Question 29 for the detailed responses.

Produces a regular walking publication (20 responses).
Sanctions walks (19).
Coordinates events/calendars (17).
Publicizes events (12).
Holds State Meeting (9).
Keeps clubs up to date on AVA matters/rules/walk changes/communication with clubs (8).
Verifies accuracy of ESR and brochure and walk directions (6).
Helps clubs solve problems (6).
Maintains web site (5).
Promotes cooperation and communication between clubs (5).
Nothing/Offer no support/Influence not noticeable (5).
Promotes Volkssporting to non-volkssporting audiences (3).
Provides workers if needed (3).
Holds Convention/Conference (3).
Provides Books/Start cards/supplies (3).

D. Room For Improvement. The question ‘What task would you like your State Organization to perform better?’ prompted numerous responses. The top responses show that the majority of clubs want their State organization to place more emphasis on promoting volkssports outside the volkssporting community. Resolving event conflicts, better communication and helping clubs were important as well. See Appendix 3, Question 30 for the detailed responses.

Promotion of volkssporting to non-volkssporting audiences (28 responses).
None, it is excellent as is (11).
Scheduling events/resolving schedule conflicts (11).
Better/faster communication (9).
Assist Clubs (9).
Helping clubs to attract new members/walkers (6).
Encouraging volkssporting (3).

E. Increasing the Fun. There were numerous responses to the question “What can your State Organization do to make volkssports more fun?”

Promote Volkssports to the non-volkssporting community (11)
Lead by Example (11)
Satisfied with what State Organization does (11)
Help clubs be more innovative (6)
Don't know (5)
Don't play favorites (4)
Better Communication (4)

The response group we have called ‘Lead by example’, included suggestions for the State Organization to hold events in areas without clubs, take the lead to create opportunities for socializing at existing events and create special events to promote the State. See Appendix 3, Question 31 for the detailed responses.

F. State Assistance to Local Clubs. The last question asked “What can your State Organization do to help your club?” Top answers recommended better communications, more information and more publicity. Two groups indicated satisfaction with the State Organizations effort, while another group is very unsatisfied, but not specific. (See Appendix 3, Question 32 for the detailed responses.) The grouped responses were:

- Better Communication/More Information (15)
- More Publicity (13)
- Nothing (10)
- Encourage clubs to work out conflicts (7)
- I am Satisfied (7)
- Don’t know (7)
- Come to our events (4)
- Very Unsatisfied (3)
- Help Recruit Members (2)

VII. AVA REGIONAL DIRECTORS

Evaluation of Performance. AVA National Officers and the ten Regional Directors have specific duties assigned by AVA Bylaws. Table 9 shows the results of the evaluation of Regional Director’s by clubs in their own region. Evaluation ratings are on a scale of 1 – 10; 10 being excellent, for each duty according to AVA Bylaws. We did not calculate average scores for regional directors because the evaluation is but a means to identify successes and areas for improvement.

Table 9 shows average scores by specific duty. A review of these averages reveals communication with State Organizations as the highest rated performance. The two lowest rated performances nationwide are development of new members (and clubs) by visiting, corresponding with and making presentations to interested groups; and identification of and assistance to ‘troubled’ clubs. Section IV has already shown there are clubs that need assistance.

Table 9. Evaluation of Regional Directors by Their Constituent Clubs

	NE	AT	SE	NC	MA	SC	SW	RM	PA	NW
Promotion of the programs of AVA	7.0	8.7	8.3	7.7	6.3	4.3	6.8	5.6	8.4	8.5
Liaison between members, clubs, State, NEC and AVA HQ	7.5	8.7	8.7	8.1	5.8	5.2	6.9	6.2	8.5	8.3
Communication with members, clubs and State Organizations	7.0	8.6	9.0	7.9	5.7	3.9	6.7	6.1	8.0	8.9
Communication with State Organization	-	9.5	8.8	8.3	5.9	-	7.3	10.0	8.5	8.4
Development of new members (and clubs) by visiting, corresponding with and making presentations to interested groups	3.0	7.5	8.0	6.6	4.8	2.4	5.9	5.0	5.7	8.3
Develop programs with AVA assistance, for the mutual benefit of all parties	6.3	8.5	7.9	6.9	4.9	3.3	6.1	4.9	7.6	8.4
Promote partnerships and sponsorships	6.3	8.1	7.1	7.1	5.0	3.2	6.8	5.3	7.6	8.0
Identify and assist ‘troubled’ clubs.	4.8	7.1	7.6	6.5	5.0	3.0	5.5	5.3	7.0	8.1
Effectiveness of Regional newsletter	6.0	7.1	8.0	7.8	4.4	2.6	3.4	6.7	7.0	8.6

This evaluation correlates with the ratings for state organizations. Regional directors are rated most effective in administrative functions involving liaison and communication with members, clubs, states and AVA HQ, and least effective in promotion of new members and clubs, local partnerships and sponsorships, developing new programs and identifying and assisting troubled clubs.

VIII. AVA COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATIONS

Table 10 shows evaluation scores for AVA Communications Publications. *The Starting Point* is rated highest of all AVA Publications with the AVA website second and the AVA Checkpoint third. Scores are shown on a scale of 1 – 10; 10 being excellent.

Table 10. Evaluation of AVA Publications

	Score
<i>The American Wanderer</i>	8.1
<i>Checkpoint</i>	8.4
<i>Starting Point</i>	8.9
RD newsletter	7.4
State Volkssport Organization publication	7.9
AVA EC Meeting Reports	7.3
Other AVA mailings	7.5
AVA website	8.6

A. *The American Wanderer* (TAW). To evaluate *The American Wanderer*, the following statement asked respondents to evaluate features of AVA’s newspaper. “*The American Wanderer* is published six times per year in a newspaper style format. The number of subscribers is steadily decreasing and costs continue to increase. To increase subscriptions, change is needed. Please answer the following questions.”

What articles would you like to see in TAW?

What features would you like to see in TAW?

How do you think we can improve TAW?

How do you think we can increase circulation?

Would you prefer a magazine format instead of the newspaper format?

1. Articles. Forty (40) respondents want to see more information about walks; past, present and future. Of those, the majority want to see articles on upcoming events. Beyond that, some like articles on past events, some do not. Some only want articles on local events, some like to read about walks in other parts of the country and the world. The second highest number of responses (26) noted recent improvements and indicated that they like TAW just the way it is.

The third highest response (21) indicated that readers want more articles on health and fitness. Specific topics mentioned include weight control, guest columns on technical aspects of walking, pedometers, walking gear and educational information not related to clubs or events.

The fourth group identified the desire for ‘How To’ articles (17), designed to help clubs recruit new members, improve events, increase success, promote volkswalking and share individual successes. A regular column with ‘how-tos’ was suggested here also.

While some people only read articles about local walks, 7 respondents want to see articles on travel. Other responses wanted to see Individual Milestones, Special Programs, Articles about Clubs, and AVA/IVV information (4 clubs). Detailed responses are in Appendix 4 under Question 35.

2. Features. The most requested feature (13) was for a Health, fitness and walking column with subjects similar to those previously described. Additional topics suggested included tips for walking in hot or cold weather, foot care, exercise suggestions and what to wear.

The second most popular idea (9 responses) was a feature to share successful ideas/walks from other AVA clubs. Topics included sample publicity ideas, how other clubs promote volkssporting events, how to build membership, increase the quality of events and attract new members. Several respondents wanted to read 'success stories' of what works.

Of the remaining respondents, seven (7) wanted milestones/awards shown for those completing AVA Special Programs, five suggested showing upcoming clubs events with pictures and five suggested more information about special 'big walks' in the United States. Four others wanted more information about AVA Officers, AVA Finances and what goes on in the Executive Council. Miscellaneous suggestions included printing the names of new club members, profiles of long-time volksmarchers, articles on AVA staff and walk statistics by state, region and nationally. Detailed responses are in Appendix 5 in the section titled Question 36.

3. Improvements. The largest category of responders (18) indicated that the TAW is fine as it is. Several noted that recent improvements were positive. The next two largest categories wanted to increase content (14) and decrease content (11), reflecting different tastes and uses for TAW. Format and the size of TAW pages (10) was next with a variety of opinions (see magazine vs. newspaper format below). Most of the remaining responses addressed specific suggestions for improvement. The full list of responses is located in Appendix 5 under Question 37.

4. How to Increase Circulation. The largest group of responses suggests that clubs help AVA by promoting TAW more actively, both in clubs and at volkssporting events. One group (8 responses) felt that circulation can't be increased because of competition from websites and email. Several suggested that TAW go 'online'. Subscription drives and more publicity for TAW were also suggested. Nine responders suggested a reduction in the subscription price, while others (5 each) suggested giving trial subscriptions and sample papers at volkssporting events. Five responders suggested separating TAW subscriptions from AVA Associate Membership. Detailed responses are in Appendix 5 in the section titled Question 38.

5. Magazine vs. newspaper format. Another question asked whether AVA ought to consider changing the format of TAW from the current newspaper format to a magazine format. Of the 188 responses, 71 % responded in favor of the current newspaper format. (No=134; yes=51; 3 = do it the cheapest way).

6. Submitting Articles to TAW. Since TAW is heavily dependent upon input from AVA clubs, one question asked how many articles the respondent's club had submitted to TAW in the last year. Forty-four per cent (98 of 222) (including State and National Officers) indicated that they had submitted at least one article. Those clubs who did not submit at least one article (124 clubs) were asked for a reason. The responses below indicate that the primary reason for a lack of submissions is finding volunteers to write and submit articles rather than a perception that their articles are not printed.

- We don't have anyone who will write an article. (74)
- I don't have the time. (47)
- I don't receive The American Wanderer. (3)
- They won't print the articles I write. (6)
- Nobody reads it anyway, so why bother. (6)

B. AVA Checkpoint. The AVA Checkpoint is a monthly newsletter sent to each club by AVA HQ. It focuses on administrative issues, changes in procedures, reports from IVV, and sponsorship and partnership programs. One question pertained to the Checkpoint's usefulness to clubs.

Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents said they regularly share AVA Checkpoint with their club members (182 of 222). An even larger percentage, 95%, stated that the Checkpoint is helpful (210 of 222).

C. AVA Website. Responders evaluated the AVA website by selecting from the list below the one choice that most reflected their experience.

- Helpful and efficient service
- Somewhat helpful in providing event information
- Inadequate assistance
- Frustrating and/or confusing

Even though this survey was conducted during implementation of a major piece of AVA's event sanctioning system, when the process was new to all users of the system, responses were positive. Ninety-one per cent (180 of 200) of the respondents checked the categories 'Helpful and efficient service' or 'Somewhat helpful in providing event information'. Only 9.5 % check the two categories 'Inadequate assistance' (1 or 0.5%) or "Frustrating and/or confusing (18 or 9%).

The majority of comments from those frustrated by the system focused on those who do not have computers or access, and those who pointed out various technical problems. Detailed comments are in Appendix 6.

IX. AVA HEADQUARTERS FUNCTIONS

A. AVA Special Programs. AVA's Special Programs are national programs where volkssporters collect events of a certain type, specified by the Special Program stamp book, in return for a unique patch or award related to the program theme. Special Programs are conducted by local clubs that share 50% of the net income with AVA as a fund-raising project. Many of the programs focus on regional areas of the United States. California Heritage was approved as a national program several years ago, but is really a state program. AVA has decided that future state programs fall to State Organizations, and that AVA Special Programs are at least multi-state in scope. Respondent evaluations of the various programs are shown in Table 11 below on a scale of 1 – 10; 10 being excellent.

1. AVA Special Programs are popular. The column titled 'Never Heard Of It' shows the number of respondents who indicated that they had not heard of the specific program as an AVA Special Program. It's logical that many outside the State of California had not heard of the California Heritage Program. One item of concern, however, is the AVA Youth Program, which is either little known as a separate program, or confused with AVA's Girl Scout Program.

2. Five kilometer distances. The final item in Table 11, 5km distances is not really an AVA Special Program, but is included to measure the popularity of shorter distances. Five km distances are allowed in the United States for traditional events under an exception to IVV’s normal distance requirements. Five kilometer distances are not allowed for year-round/seasonal events under current IVV rules. The high rating it received indicates strong support from AVA clubs for shorter distances.

Table 11. AVA Special Programs

	Score	Never Heard of it
AVA Youth Program	6.1	43
Girl Scout Program	6.2	18
National Physical Fitness and Sports Month	7.0	7
National Volkssport Month	7.0	8
50 states/51 Capitols Award	8.7	2
Lewis & Clark Trail	8.2	7
Civil War Walks	8.1	14
Walking the USA A to Z	8.4	14
National Heritage Walks	8.3	14
College Campus Program	8.3	14
Lighthouse USA	7.8	27
Revolutionary War Sites	7.8	24
Original 13 States	8.0	22
California National Heritage	7.1	60
Corporate sponsorship - New Balance	9.2	3
Corporate partnership with GNC	7.6	7
5km distances	8.7	1

3. Future AVA Special Programs. There were many responses to the question which asked what special programs volkssporters would like. For event programs, many responders felt that there are enough special programs in place; some think we should have less, others think we should retire and replace programs with new ideas. Many specific ideas are among the detailed responses in Appendix 7. There is support for AVA’s decision to limit special event programs to those that are regional or national in scope and leaving state programs to state organizations or individual clubs.

- No Additional Ones (16 responses)
- Improve What We Have (12)
- Less than we have now (10)
- Allow 5 km on Year-Round/Seasonal Events (6)
- Keep them going (6)
- More programs to get new walkers, including younger adults and children (5)
- Smaller Scope than National (3)

4. Corporate Sponsors and Partners. Table 11 also contains evaluations of AVA sponsorship by New Balance and the corporate partnership with General Nutrition Centers (GNC). New Balance is very popular as a sponsor. GNC’s rating was somewhat lower, but many comments noted the newness of the partnership and felt it was too soon to give an opinion.

5. Non-Event AVA Programs. Several responses addressed ‘AVA Special Programs’ in broader terms and again focused on the need for national publicity and advertising as well as regional training for officers and to teach clubs how to recruit new members.

B. AVA Fees and Charges. Although AVA is a non-profit organization, it must bring in enough income to support services provided to members and clubs, e.g. event insurance, awards processing, supplies, website, postage, etc. Taking the need for income into account, respondents evaluated AVA fees and charges in terms of being too high, too low or about right. Table 12 shows votes in each category and the average vote for each fee (two being About Right with a lower score tending toward too high and a higher score toward too low).

Average scores indicate that most clubs feel AVA fees are ‘about right’. New Walker Kits and IVV Books scored among the lowest. Participation fees, the most recent AVA fee to be increased, scored closest to being too high.

Table 12. AVA Fees and Charges

	Too High	About Right	Too Low	Average
Application for membership (\$50)	30	174	18	1.95
Annual Dues (\$50 per year)	25	198	18	1.97
Regular/traditional Sanction Fee (\$30 per walk)	38	188	9	1.87
Other Event sanction fees (\$20)	8	204	16	2.04
Participation Fees (\$1.25)	56	160	8	1.79
IVV Credit event registration fee (up to \$3)	35	174	10	1.88
Volkssport Associate Membership (\$25/30 per yr)	40	161	10	1.87
IVV Books (\$5 ea)	6	205	13	2.03
New Walker Kit (\$5)	6	196	20	2.06
The Starting Point (price set yearly)	23	189	2	1.90
IVV Schedule of Events book (price set yearly)	11	138	3	1.95
AVA Specialty Items	13	171	8	1.97

C. Evaluation of AVA Headquarters Functions

1. Perceptions of AVA Headquarters. Responders were asked “How many **paid** employees do you think AVA has? If you don’t know, please guess.” The purpose for this question was to measure the effectiveness of AVA communications with clubs. Although the number of AVA paid employees (6) was published in the AVA Checkpoint in the month before the survey, 35 clubs thought that AVA had 10 or more employees (one responder guessed 100 employees; another thought HQ was all volunteers). Sixty percent of responders gave answers of 5, 6 or 7 employees.

2. Evaluation of AVA HQ Functions. Evaluations of AVA Headquarters functions are shown in Table 13 below, on a scale of 1 – 10; 10 being excellent. AVA Headquarters overall performance was rated at 75 and customer service at 78. The lowest ratings were promotion of stronger clubs and promotion of greater event participation, both at 5.3. These scores are consistent with evaluations of State Organizations and Regional Directors. Raising funds is the next lowest score, indicating that AVA member clubs expect more to be done in that area.

Table 13. Evaluation of AVA HQ Functions

SUBJECT AREA	Score
IVV Awards Processing	7.9
Preparation and delivery of event stamps	8.1
Raising funds	5.9
Communications with clubs	7.5
Financial invoices and monthly billings	7.3
Finding corporate sponsors	6.7
National partnerships	6.7
Promoting stronger clubs	5.3
Promoting greater event participation	5.3
Developing national programs	6.9
AVA products	7.0
Written policy and procedures	7.1
AVA communication with members	6.9
Responsiveness to members	7.5
Responsiveness to clubs	7.6
Responsiveness to State Organization	7.9
Responsiveness to Regional Directors	8.1
Effectiveness of AVA Leadership	7.2
Customer Service	7.8
Overall Performance	7.5

3. Most Important Nationwide Issue. A follow-up question asked each responder to identify the single most important nationwide issue facing AVA from a list of choices. The results are very clear that the decline in participation is the key concern of AVA clubs.

- Decreasing number of walkers. 191 responses
- Decreasing number of AVA clubs. 32
- Need more AVA sponsors and partners. 14
- YRE/Seasonal walks vs. traditional, regular events. 5
- Number of year-round seasonal events. 3

D. AVA Strategic Plan. Two questions were devoted to AVA’s Strategic Plan. The survey stated that the Strategic Plan covers the next several years and focuses on increasing participation in AVA events and acquiring stable broad-based financial resources to support AVA programs as the two most important challenges facing AVA.

When asked if they agreed with the priorities established in the Strategic Plan, 94% of respondents (198 of 211) agreed. Those who disagreed (See Appendix 8 for all responses) felt that the priority ought to be publicity (3), Advertising (3), increasing participation (3), and strengthening clubs (2). Several respondents noted that they had never seen AVA’s Strategic Plan.

E. National Spirit. The term National Spirit titled a group of issues related to volkssporting. Table 14 shows the results on a scale of 1 – 10, 10 being excellent). While there may be more than one interpretation to ‘poor and excellent’, it is interesting to note that the number and quality of year-round events nationwide, as well as within each of the respondent’s states, is rated slightly higher than the number and quality of traditional volkssporting events. Quality of maps used for year-round events was the lowest rated aspect of AVA events. New Balance prizes and giveaways are highly rated. AVA’s New Walker Kit is also highly rated.

Table 14. National Spirit

SUBJECT AREA	Score
Number of Traditional Events nationwide	7.5
Quality of traditional events overall nationwide	7.2
Number of year-round events nationwide	7.9
Quality of year-round events overall nationwide	7.3
Quality of traditional events overall in your state	7.7
Number of Traditional Events in your state	7.4
Quality of year-round events overall in your state	7.9
Number of year-round event in your state	7.9
Quality of written walk directions	7.2
Quality of brochures and event flyers	7.7
Quality of maps provided with walk directions	7.0
New Balance Giveaways	8.3
New Balance Shoe Door prize	9.3
New Balance Event Kits	9.0
New Walker Kits	9.3

A follow-up question asked for actions that AVA could take to make members feel as much a part of National and International organizations as they do about their own club. Fifteen responses identified better communication from AVA. Others suggested more visibility by AVA, more access to AVA officers, recognition awards and promotion of special programs. Appendix 9 contains all of the detail responses and groups specific tasks that AVA HQ, AVA officers, clubs and individuals can do to create a greater sense of belonging to our national and international organizations.

F. AVA Convention. Of the 223 responses, 152 or 68% of AVA club/state/national officers said they had attended at least one AVA Convention. Seventy-one or 32% have never attended an AVA Convention. Reasons given for attending were not surprising. The predominant choice given for attending the convention was events (checked by 142 respondents), followed by socials and workshops (84 responses each), business meetings and reuniting with friends (76 responses each), sightseeing (59), meeting candidates for national office (46) and awards (34).

When asked what areas of AVA Convention could be improved, areas of improvement designated most often are AVA business meetings (47 responses) and workshops (36 responses), followed by socials (25) events (22), and registration (19).

The majority of responses focused upon keeping business meetings, professional, concise and short. Responders also wanted a schedule that did not overlap workshops with events or the business meetings. Some of the detailed comments are valid suggestions which merit consideration by the AVA Convention Committee. Examples include a suggestion to conduct workshops in the evening, or alter the duration of workshops to cover some subjects in greater depth. Appendix 10 contains the detailed responses.

G. AVA Membership Benefits. According to AVA Bylaws, AVA Clubs are voting members of AVA and individuals are not. However, AVA has promoted AVA Associate Membership for many years, primarily as a fund-raising effort. AVA Associate Membership fees entitle each Associate Member to a subscription to *The American Wanderer* and occasional discount offers such as car rentals and hotels. To assess individual perceptions of AVA Membership, each responder was asked whether they are an AVA Associate Member, if not, why not, and how AVA can improve the benefits of being an AVA member.

1. AVA Volkssport Associate Membership. When asked whether or not they were AVA Associate members, 72% (165) of those responding said yes, 28% (65) said no. Answers to the follow-up question, “If no, why not?” the most common category was that the respondent felt there is no value in joining. Eighteen separate respondents included comments in this vein.

Second is cost of membership listed by seven respondents. Third, another seven respondents felt that club membership is sufficient. Fourth, lack of membership information caused five respondents not to join. This group stated that they either didn’t know the benefits of membership or they didn’t understand how to join, thinking that by using AVA books or by joining a club they were members.

The fifth category is composed of another five respondents who aren’t currently members because their membership had expired and they had forgotten to renew it or just hadn’t done it yet. Appendix 11 contains the detailed responses.

2. How to improve AVA member benefits. The top response was a request for more discounts, more benefits or more freebies. The second largest group identified the need for more communication and publicity on the part of AVA. Members and non-members alike are unclear what AVA does to benefit associate members and clubs. Seven respondents asked, “What benefits?” apparently feeling that there is no benefit to being an AVA Associate member or that the only benefit is receiving *The American Wanderer*.

Seven respondents, who are AVA Associate members, stated that they are AVA members simply to support AVA, not because they perceive an additional benefit to being a member. While three respondents did mention the expense as being too high, by far the largest number of respondents who commented, whether members or not, felt that benefits for joining as an Associate Member were minimal or non-existent.

3. AVA Life Membership Benefits.

All respondents, not just Life Members, evaluated the importance of AVA Life Member benefits as advertised in previous AVA promotions. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being important, current Life Member benefits scored as follows:

Priority Processing for IVV award books	4.9
15% discount on AVA specialty items	5.1
Discount on Convention Fees	6.5

When asked how to improve AVA Life Member benefits, the largest group suggested lowering the cost of life membership. That action may attract more life members, but it tends to defeat the purpose of life membership: to support AVA. Some respondents were clear in their belief that AVA has not lived up to its previous advertising of benefits. Others hadn’t heard about the benefits. Appendix 11, Question 62, contains the detailed responses.

- Lower the cost (11 response)
- I’m satisfied (9)
- Recognition as life member (8)
- Publicize the benefits (8)
- Implement priority processing for IVV books (4)
- It is my way of supporting AVA (4)

H. AVA Event Awards. The final set of survey questions gathered information about AVA special event Awards, including those designed for National Physical Fitness and Sports Month (May each year) and National Annual Volkssport Month (October each year).

Of all respondents, 88% (196 of 223) indicated that they had purchased an AVA event award. When asked to identify the most important factor in their decision whether to purchase an award (see below), value or price of the award was the smallest response category. It seems clear that enough volkssporters continue to be interested in awards that clubs should try to offer awards, at least for some of their events.

- Design (69)
- No one factor most important (63)
- Type of award (i.e. sun catcher, hat pin, medal, etc.) (52)
- Collect “A” medals in general (32)
- Value/price (11 responses)

Regarding patches for National Physical Fitness and Sports Month (May each year) or National Annual Volkssport Month (October each year), the survey asked whether the responder’s club purchased these AVA-produced patches. Of those who answered, the majority indicated that they had purchased patches in prior years, but not recently.

- Yes (50)
- Yes, in prior years, but not recently. (92)
- No (6)

The most important factor in the club’s decision whether to purchase these event awards from AVA was:

- No one factor most important (75)
- Support national programs (54)
- Design (24)
- Price (18)
- Value (6)
- Unaware of the availability of the patch from AVA. (4)

X. SURVEY ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Many AVA clubs have stable or growing memberships and adequate finances, while some clubs flounder. Five Regions show growth and five show decline. AVA Volkssport Associate membership has declined significantly. A number of those who are not members, 27%, perceive a lack of value in membership. Others cited lack of publicity of membership requirements and/or lack of communication with members as reasons for not being members.
2. Forty percent of AVA club presidents are in their first two years in the position.
3. While AVA is portrayed as family-oriented, AVA is not composed of a high percentage of children. Most club members are at the age where children have grown and left home, or are in high school or college. Responses show that roughly 4% of club members are under the age of 21.
4. Although the number of AVA clubs continues to decline, there is evidence that the much-broadcast decline of our sport may be overstated. **Eighty percent** of club presidents report that club membership is steady or increasing. From numerous responses, a lack of available finances is not the major issue facing AVA clubs.
5. Club Activities. When asked, 50% of AVA clubs reported that they had monthly meetings; 53% reported having a club newsletter; 55% have an email address and 43% have a website. The degree to which AVA clubs have embraced technology to market volkssporting is gratifying, but what of the other 45-50% of AVA clubs? Local publicity and marketing must be improved. Successes achieved by some clubs should be shared with other clubs.
6. The major problem facing AVA clubs is a lack of members in general and a lack of active volunteers willing to hold office and conduct events. Clubs perceive that national publicity from AVA would help them locally. Evaluations show that AVA clubs want their regional directors, state organizations (where applicable) and AVA Headquarters to increase assistance to troubled clubs and help create new clubs.
7. The average AVA club holds four traditional events and five year-round/seasonal events each year. The overwhelming majority of events are walks. Most clubs review and revise traditional event routes every year and year-round/seasonal events every two to three years although a significant number of clubs do not revise year-round/seasonal routes on a regular basis. Aside from websites, clubs focus their local publicity more internally through volkssporting channels than through external sources to the non-volkssporting public. The quantity of year-round events nationwide, as well as within each of the states, rates slightly higher than the quantity of traditional volkssporting events.
8. Evaluations of state organizations, regional directors and officers, and AVA Headquarters clearly show successes and areas for improvement. Promotion of volkssporting and better communications with constituent clubs are the two most important areas of improvement for state organizations according to clubs. Survey results indicate that regional directors need to focus more on assisting troubled clubs and the creation of new clubs while working to increase participation.
9. AVA Publications are important. Clubs rate *The American Wanderer* (TAW), the AVA Website, *Starting Point* and the AVA Checkpoint as valuable communications aids. Although subscriptions to TAW are declining many clubs noted improvements in both content and format. Suggestions for improvement of

content were numerous. The AVA Website is a success. Automated sanctioning of events is a major improvement in administration. Many clubs want improvements in other areas of administration as well.

10. AVA Special Programs are popular. While some respondents feel a bit overwhelmed by the number of special walking programs, others love it and want more. Recent decisions by the Special Programs Committee that limit the number of programs at any one time, focus on regional/national programs and systematically rotate new programs to replace older programs could address the concerns raised.

11. The majority of responders view AVA fees and charges as appropriate and reasonable. The two fees viewed as too high are event sanction fees and the fee for AVA Associate Membership.

12. A large majority (94%) of clubs support the objectives of AVA's Strategic Plan (increasing participation in AVA events and acquiring stable broad-based financial resources). Some are unaware that the Strategic Plan exists.

13. New Balance continues to be a popular sponsor for volkssporters. New Balance giveaways and event sponsorships are highly rated.

14. AVA Headquarters responsiveness to customers is good considering the limited staff available and the number of clubs, state organizations and national officers.

15. AVA Associate Membership (per the AVA Executive Director) has declined much faster in the last 12 months than total AVA membership (10.6 % vs. 0.43 %). This indicates that AVA Volkssport Associate membership is not effectively promoted, particularly to new volkssporters. Another conclusion is that AVA Membership is not sufficiently attractive or meaningful to volkssporters. There is confusion as to the requirements for membership and the membership fee is least popular of all AVA fees. The content and volume of detailed responses suggest that most respondents perceive Volkssport Associate membership as having no meaningful benefits for their membership fee, or only the TAW subscription as a benefit.

16. AVA Life Membership is different than Associate Membership, but viewed as the same by many clubs. Some responders feel that the best way to improve Life Memberships is to offer more and more discounts, which tends to defeat the purpose of fund-raising in support of AVA. Other AVA Life Members note that they purchased life membership simply to support the organization they love. There is also a perception that AVA doesn't live up to its past offers of benefits, particularly priority processing of IVV award books. Others felt more recognition of life members may cause improvement.

17. AVA Conventions. While the primary purpose of the convention is to conduct business, and workshops there play a major role in the AVA fulfilling its educational purpose, only about half of respondents who had attended a convention found those components a reason for attending. Many suggestions were received for ways to improve them.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS.

This survey identified numerous areas of improvement for AVA. Addressing these needs should make a positive impact. AVA leadership must take steps to improve the association at all levels. Specific recommendations are below.

1. AVA Training Program. The survey is replete with examples of limited experience and areas for improvement where training would be a very beneficial solution. Though the need for training was not addressed in the survey, it certainly could help address many less than satisfactory findings. The AVA's Training Committee needs to develop and implement a nationwide program as soon as possible.

2. Marketing. AVA's Marketing Committee should take AVA's average age group of 45 to 58 into account as much as young people or families when designing marketing and advertising and consider focusing limited resources to recruit this group. AVA's Marketing Committee should conduct research to determine which demographic groups are important marketing targets.

3. Marketing and Publicity. The extent of marketing and publicity for volkssports at national, regional and local levels leaves room for improvement based on survey results. AVA's Publicity Committee should take the lead to help develop systematic approaches to evaluate publicity needs and provide appropriate assistance at all levels of AVA.

4. Sharing Success. Regional directors should find ways to share successes and discuss regional issues apart from the twice-a-year NEC meetings when they are conducting national business. AVA HQ should encourage state organizations to do the same. Publications like Checkpoint and *The American Wanderer* could be used to disseminate the information nationally.

5. The American Wanderer. AVA ED and the TAW contractor should review detailed survey responses to continue improvements and identify new features. AVA should enlist the support of AVA clubs to increase subscriptions. AVA should consider an annual subscription campaign. Follow-up on lapsed subscriptions is critical.

6. AVA Website. AVA's Technology and Internet Committee and AVA ED should incorporate administrative processing into AVA website functions, including event sponsorship requests, requests for event supplies, club officer updates, mailing address changes, recognition awards processing, etc.

7. AVA Strategic Plan. The AVA Headquarters should send a copy of the most recent Strategic Plan update to clubs to inform them of the specific actions that AVA has taken to move our sport forward. The AVA President should request national committee volunteers at the same time.

8. AVA Associate Membership. The AVA Bylaws Committee should include a membership subsection addressing AVA Volkssport Associate membership in the next Bylaws update. The AVA ED should review the benefits of AVA Volkssport Associate membership for clarification. The AVA Headquarters should conduct periodic membership drives.

9. AVA Life Membership. AVA Headquarters should more clearly differentiate Life Members from Individual and Family Associate Members. Fulfill previous promises made by implementing priority processing of IVV record books and assuring that discounts for specialty items and AVA convention fees for Life Members are provided. Find new ways to recognize life members. Recognition and improved treatment of Life Members could produce new memberships.