

Planning for a Majority of None: Web Site, Mentors Reach Varied Groups

Summary

The Santa Clara County Association of REALTORS® decided it made business sense to encourage professionals from diverse backgrounds to take leadership positions within the Association. Using information from a survey of new members, the Association's Equal Opportunities Committee has launched a multifaceted outreach and mentoring program targeting Hispanic, Chinese American, Vietnamese, and other populations.

Background

About 1.7 million people live in Santa Clara County in northern California, which includes Silicon Valley and San José. Census figures for the county show that the area is becoming increasingly diverse. The ethnic diversity of REALTORS® has followed this trend as well.

More than 2,600 of the 8,300-plus members—31 percent—of the Santa Clara County Association of REALTORS® (SCCAOR) speak a primary language other than English. The SCCAOR Board of Directors recognized that the continued vitality of its Association depended on promoting leadership from among its newer members and creating a mechanism to give all members a better understanding of the cultural and ethnic background of homebuyers and sellers.

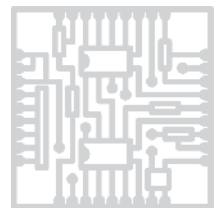
"We decided to make internal changes that reflected not only our membership but also our changing community," says Paul Stewart, former executive director of SCCAOR. "Our work starts with our own organization."

What the Association Did

Former SCCAOR president Mike Donohoe announced that one of the major goals for 2003 would be to reach out to minority members to foster leadership opportunities within SCCAOR. The Board established the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) under the chairmanship of Edwin P. Resuello, broker-owner of Silicon Valley Homes and now on SCCAOR's Board of Directors.

The EOC's 14 members are volunteers and its 2003 budget was about \$10,000. SCCAOR's public relations and communications director also provides support and a staff person carries out occasional administrative responsibilities. "It's helpful to have a staff person who essentially becomes a liaison to the other committees to see what the other parts of the organization are doing," notes Resuello.

8,300
MEMBERS



An online survey yielded useful information on the demographics of Santa Clara County's real estate professionals and supported anecdotal evidence from SCCAOR's orientation sessions for new members. At the time SCCAOR had 5,700 members, and previous surveys of the membership have usually generated about 40 responses. In order to get statistically significant results, SCCAOR promoted the survey in its online newsletter and announced a prize drawing for a Palm Pilot. Nearly 450 members responded, over 10 times the average. The statistics gave the Association not only information about the ethnic and cultural background of respondents, but also revealed that 83 percent were full-time real estate agents and 56 percent had less than 10 years experience. Based on these results, SCCAOR implemented two innovations:

Multicultural Web site: The EOC translated part of SCCAOR's Web site into Spanish and basic Chinese and plans further translations into Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The Web site makes information more accessible to members and also includes a searchable database that allows the public to identify REALTORS® who are fluent in a language other than English. Web-Translations in Wakefield, England, translated SCCAOR's Web site into Spanish and Chinese for about \$11,000. Information technology manager Andrea Harbert spent about 20 hours on the project and notes that little is needed to maintain the pages, which change infrequently.

Leadership and Mentoring Program: The EOC established a Leadership and Mentoring Program (LAMP) using volunteers from the committee who reflect the Chinese, Filipino, Hungarian, Korean, Middle Eastern, and Vietnamese REALTOR® membership. As part of LAMP's goal to identify and mentor future SCCAOR leaders from among minority REALTORS®, the EOC fostered links with groups of real estate professionals from diverse cultures. Initial outreach efforts focused on strengthening ties to existing groups, including the Chinese American Real Estate Association, the Hispanic Association of Real Estate Professionals, and the Women's Council of Realtors.

SCCAOR also encourages the development of new groups. LAMP activities include a newsletter and toolkit to help future leaders establish minority REALTOR® groups, with an eye toward attaining leadership positions in SCCAOR. The toolkit, developed by the public relations and communications director, focuses on the organizational basics of chartering a real estate association, such as:

- Sample bylaws for a board of directors
- Rules of parliamentary procedure
- Job descriptions for the officers and first board of directors
- Member recruitment.

These groups would act autonomously and would not pay dues to SCCAOR, but a majority of their respective boards and members would be SCCAOR members.

In essence, the EOC wants to give SCCAOR members organizational expertise that they can “put into a binder, take somewhere else, and create a group,” says Resuello.

The goals of LAMP benefit SCCAOR in several ways. Minority real estate professionals establish and enhance services to their communities. These professionals encourage other members of the minority associations to join SCCAOR. They bring with them their cultural backgrounds and expertise in working with members of their own ethnic or cultural communities. And they use leadership skills acquired in the smaller associations to enhance the administration and efficacy of SCCAOR. The general membership of SCCAOR learns the “hot” words or topics that influence buying and selling in a particular ethnic community.

Outcomes

Many new SCCAOR members are from minority groups and have expressed an interest in leadership positions. Included among these are real estate professionals who have joined the EOC and are working to establish associations with ties to SCCAOR.

The Filipino-American Real Estate Professionals Association held its first meeting in May 2003, thanks in large part to the work of Resuello (who has a Filipino background), Ray Maglalang, and the EOC. Shortly afterwards, other members of SCCAOR asked for help in forming an Indo-American association (for real estate professionals with Middle Eastern, Indian, or Pan-Pacific backgrounds) and a Vietnamese American association.

EOC chairman Resuello notes that “buy-in” from traditional majority members is critical. “I do think that this would have been much more difficult had it not been one of the primary goals of the president,” he says. Donohoe’s announcement of the program at the beginning of 2003 “made it formal, something where everyone expected to see results.” Stewart contacted local government officials interested in equal opportunity, and conversations with those officials gave the effort more media attention.

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