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# Trends in Acquiring New Members and Retaining Loyal Members at Rochester Regional Museums

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The Rochester Institute of Technology  
College of Liberal Arts

Trends in Acquiring New Members and Retaining Loyal  
Members at Rochester Regional Museums

A Thesis Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment Of The  
Bachelor of Science Degree  
In Museum Studies  
Performing Arts & Visual Culture Department

By  
Joshua L. Stapf

May 2015

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
Literature Review	2
National Trends	4
Organizations	6
Data	10
Memorial Art Gallery	10
Memorial Art Gallery Recommendations	16
The Strong	19
The Strong Recommendations	22
Seneca Park Zoo	24
Seneca Park Zoo Recommendations	26
Challenges	27
Conclusion	29
Appendix	31
Surveys	31
Tables	39
Bibliography	43



## **ABSTRACT:**

Membership is a very important aspect of many organizations like the Memorial Art Gallery (MAG), The Strong (TS), and the Seneca Park Zoo (SPZ). Membership gives an organization a vital source of income and museums can also use those annual members as a built-in long-term donor pool if conversion of members into donors happens. Conversion means taking a member and having them donate an additional philanthropic gift on top of paying to be a museum member. Within an organization's membership program, two aspects are inherent: acquisition of new members to the organization as well as retention of its current members. While many organizations are trying to streamline cost and staffing, certain other aspects may need to be reprioritized. This thesis considers the budget allocated to membership at three Rochester museums and collecting institutions, the structure and focus of Rochester-based membership departments as part of the organization, as well as the location in which the membership department is housed within the institution. A key question of this study is whether membership activities are the primary focus of a dedicated membership coordinator or are a secondary job for another department within the museum setting? Using data from 2012, 2013, and 2014 the researcher reviews membership changes to illustrate current practices of new member acquisition and the retention of current members. The effectiveness of these methods will also be examined. After analyzing and interpreting the data, the researcher has generated a cost vs. dollars raised comparison for the last three years that will be used to suggest how these, and other similar organizations, might better focus resources to increase effectiveness in new member acquisition and retention of members.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Membership as defined by the Webster English Dictionary is “the state of belonging to or being part of a group or organization.<sup>1</sup>” Membership at the institutions that will be examined in this thesis involve a financial commitment. While membership has always been part of the philanthropic stability of non-profits, recently there have been changes in the industry, and this thesis seeks to determine what is happening and then make concrete recommendations for future best practices that may be used at the three regional institutions. While membership programs are essential, it would appear that some regional non-profits no longer have the luxury of devoting a single staff member to this effort. The Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) had a dedicated membership person up to about three years, and then the full-time position was eliminated. Today membership duties at the MAG are now distributed between two existing staff members within the marketing department. This one local example leads the researcher to query; 1) Why is this happening? 2) When duties are re-distributed, where do the duties fall? 3) Are they within development or within marketing? 4) Why is downsizing happening? 5) Is this a regional trend and/or a national trend? 6) If membership is such a vital source to an organization, why is it that many are pushing membership to the wayside?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Web. 1 Feb. 2015.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership can be divided into two very general and distinct groups: new member acquisition and retention of existing members, also known as renewed members. New member acquisition refers to individuals who were not members of the organization last year, but who will become members in the current year. Renewed members—those members who were members of the organization last year and who will renew their membership in the current year—may be differentiated as well, to be explained below.

A new member is someone that remits in a cash contribution to become a member this year, but was not a member the year prior. Bringing on a new acquisition for an organization may take more time and resources than encouraging a current member to renew their existing membership for a consecutive calendar year. People who become a member of an organization are not only joining to help support the organization financially, but they do so to also enjoy the benefits of membership. Those benefits could include invitations to exhibition opening night parties, reduced entry cost, discounts at the museum shop, admission to exclusive events, such as lectures, and also many offer reciprocal admission with other regional museums.

These benefits will also affect the Fair Market Value (FMV) of said membership. What that means is that while a member might be paying \$100 to become a member, due to the real cost of the benefits the membership might only have a tax-deductible value of \$50 in the eyes of the Internal Revenue Service. As most membership organizations are deemed non-profits, members are able to declare portions of their membership fee as “donated” dollars on their personal income tax and receive some tax-deductions when filing<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Rich, Patricia, and Dana Hines. *Membership Development: An Action Plan for Results*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen, 2002. Print



A Renewing Member is someone who was a member and continues membership in the contiguous calendar year. Renewing members fall into three groups: 1) Constituent who renewed at the same level; 2) Constituent who renewed at an increased level; and 3) Constituent who renewed at a decreased level. Organizations prefer members to renew at the same or higher level than the previous year. This is not always the case though, as some members will decrease their level depending on an array of reasons that could be related to the organization and its mission or other circumstances, such as: a change in household income, household size, or personal priorities to name a few examples.

## **NATIONAL TRENDS**

Nationally membership has had a steady increase over the last three years. Annually membership increased 2.8% in 2012, 2.1% in 2013, and 1.2% in 2014<sup>3</sup>. Even though over all membership increased that is not true for all types of museums and collecting institutions. When you look more closely at the different types of institutions you see that places like children's museums are increasing 5+%, while art museums are seeing a stable membership level. Renewal of members saw a decrease from 2012 to 2014 and has an opposite trend compared to membership growth. Children museums are seeing a 4% decrease while art institutions are seeing a 4% increase over the three years that were examined.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 2014 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> 2013 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC. 2014.

Every year Morey Group, a division of The Lukens Company, conduct a survey that is disseminated via e-mail to on average 250 different institutions that include art museums, botanical gardens, zoos, children museums, and aquariums. The focus of this survey is to collect information on attendance, membership, and admission costs across the nation. With the conclusion of the survey a report is compiled and then sent to the participating organizations so that they can use them as metrics to compare to nationally. The best way to break the data down that is provided is to look at individual types of organizations on their own.

In 2012, art museums saw the largest drop in membership nationwide with a 3.3% decrease in membership numbers. In 2013 and 2014, there was still a decrease in membership nationally at art museums but, with it being under 1%, -0.3% and -0.5% respectfully, the Morey Group considers that to be a stable decrease.<sup>5</sup> Renewal at art institutions on the other hand has seen an over all increase. In 2012 63% of members renewed, 68% in 2013, and than there was a slight drop in 2014 to 67%. This shows that even though nationally there was a 516-member decrease from 2012 to 2014, art museums have been able to retain two-thirds of their members<sup>6</sup>.

Children's museums have seen the great increase in membership of the last three years, from a 1% decrease in 2012 to an increase of 5.9% in 2013, and a 5.7% increase in 2014. Over all children's museums has seen about an 11% increase in membership from 2012 to 2014. Nationally children's museums have seen an additional 823 memberships join of the last three. Even though children's museums are seeing an increase in membership they are seeing a decrease in renewals to their organizations. In 2014, children's museums only had a 39% renewal rating. Of the 8,172 memberships of children museums from the 2014 Cultural

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<sup>5</sup> 2012 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> 2014 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC, 2015.

Attraction Trends Report, only 3,014 of those members were returning to those organizations. Breaking that down further, even though those organizations had 444-member increase over all, they actually obtained 5,159 new members in the surveyed children's museums<sup>7</sup>.

Membership at zoos nationally has started to slow down over the past three years; in 2012 they had a 4.1% increase, 1.2% increase in 2013, and 0.3% increase in 2014. Those percentages equate to an over all addition of 1,548 members to the surveyed zoos over the past three years. Renewals for zoos over the past three years has seen an up and down drop that averages to a 3% decrease overall, 59% in 2012, 61% in 2013, and 56% in 2014. Renewals at zoos nationally surveyed have been on average 2% about the overall average of all cultural attractions in the survey.

Nationally membership for all cultural attractions has had an increase for the last three years, but it does seem to be slowing down. Renewal nationally has seen a slight decrease of 1% overall fro the past three years. There was 56% renewal in 2012, 59% renewal in 2013, and 2014 had a 55% renewal. When comparing art museums, children's museums, and zoos renewal rating to the overall you see that art museums are above national average with 63%, 68%, and 67% in 2012,2013, and 2014. Zoos are pretty on par with what overall average having 59% in 2012, 61% in 2013, and 56% in 2014. Children's museums on the other hand have a drastically lower renewal rate; 43% in 2012, 41% in 2013, and 39% in 2014, which shows and overall and steady decrease of renewed members<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> 2013 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> 2012 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC. 2013.

2013 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC. 2014.

2014 Cultural Attraction Trend Report. Morey Group. Charleston, SC. 2015.

## ORGANIZATIONS

This thesis will consider three established organizations within the Greater Rochester Community, including The Memorial Art Gallery (MAG), The Strong, and lastly the Seneca Park Zoo (SPZ). Each of these three organizations are collecting institutions that have very strong membership bases and use it to raise a portion of their revenue, even though each organization's collection focuses in areas that are very different from each other. These three organizations were picked due to their fields of study and size. Originally a fourth location, the George Eastman House, was included in the research, but due to lack of response and data they were removed from the study. Had they still been included the institutions would have been pairs for comparison: two that are children/ family focus and two that are more adult focused.

The first organization is the Seneca Park Zoo (SPZ) located at 2222 St. Paul Street in Rochester. The focus of this organization is to “provide engaging and educational experiences to give the community the motivation and skills to act as stewards of the environment through the exhibition of animals in naturalistic settings.”<sup>9</sup> The collection of the SPZ is a living collection that includes frogs, parrots, eagles, elephants, leopards, and snakes among other animals. Some of the animals are very basic that can be found on your local farm, while others are rare and exotics and you would have to travel half way around the world and through a jungle just to attempt to view the animals in their natural habitat.

The SPZ opened to the public in 1893, but it was until about thirty-eight years later in 1931 that the first major exhibit with exotic animals was opened to the public. Much of the expansion of the property and also the acquisition of more animals happened in the 1990s and

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<sup>9</sup> “Seneca Park Zoo- Seneca Park Zoo.” Seneca Park Zoo- Seneca Park Zoo. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

early 2000s with the addition of new building and animals as well as the rebuilding and redesign of popular animal exhibits<sup>10</sup>.

The SPZ is sort of an outlier compared to the other three organizations to be discussed in this study because even though it is open twelve months a year, according to the Director of Development, Charles Levensgood, the majority of SPZ's activities happen in a six to eight month span of time. The SPZ does have a dedicated staff member for membership and also membership is handled within the Development and Admissions department for the organization. Membership at the SPZ is offered in different levels to offer the person purchasing different donor premiums based on what they seek to gain from the membership experience.

At the SPZ membership packages start at \$52 for an individual membership and extend to \$300 for the Otter Circle (See Table 1). Besides also offering the six different membership packages the SPZ also offers "add-ons" that for an augmented fee, and these may be included into any of their pre-existing membership packages. The dedicated staffs of two are not the only ones that handle membership at the SPZ. Membership is greatly supplemented by the Admissions department at the SPZ, with it being part of training with Admission staff and also there is a monetary incentive for staff members to sign guest up with a membership. It is instilled into the training of the Admissions' staff to try and encourage zoo-goers who are coming to the SPZ for the day to sign up for a year-long membership.

This thesis now shifts from the Seneca Park Zoo to a second organization; the Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) is located at 500 University Avenue in downtown Rochester, in the heart of the city's Arts District. This organization's focus is to "connect people with art in a welcoming

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<sup>10</sup> "Seneca Park Zoo- Seneca Park Zoo." Seneca Park Zoo- Seneca Park Zoo. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

and stimulating environment through its permanent collection, temporary exhibitions, and public programs.”<sup>11</sup> The fine art and sculptures that are housed within the walls of the MAG range from the ancient world through contemporary, including painting, sculpture, furniture, and even a restored Italian Baroque Organ.

The MAG was first founded in 1913 by Emily Sibley Watson, and according to the history of the MAG, even though it is one of only a few art museums that are strongly affiliated with a university that also act as a primary art museum for the community, it is primarily supported by its endowment (39%) and by funds raised from memberships and gifts (35%). The university that the MAG is connected to is the University of Rochester (U of R). The museum was established and endowed as a memorial to Ms. Watson’s son, James G. Averell, who was an architect in Rochester<sup>12</sup>.

According the MAG 2013-2014 Annual Report there were 4,685 individual and corporate members. Membership it is a very important part of the revenue for the MAG, as it makes up 35% of its operational budget. It is surprising that currently they no longer have a dedicated full-time staff member working on membership. The MAG now has membership duties split between two employees in the Public Relations and Marketing department. Membership duties are a secondary focus of these staff members’ jobs.

A dedicated staff member no longer handles membership duties, and membership is also no longer handled within the Development department. The task of membership has also been broken down and distributed to two staff members within the MAG’s Public Relations and Marketing department. The reason that that is different is because traditionally within a non-

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<sup>11</sup> “Memorial Art Gallery.” Memorial Art Gallery. Web. 14 May 2015.

<sup>12</sup> “Memorial Art Gallery.” Memorial Art Gallery. Web. 14 May 2015.

profit culture all contributed income is handled by a Development department. The MAG does have a Development director, but the membership duties are handled by the Public Relations and Marketing department.

The MAG offers nine different levels of membership that start off at an individual membership for \$65 and go all the way up to what is called the Director's Circle, which is \$10,000+<sup>13</sup>. The benefits that come with each level change significantly as you increase in levels. Some of the benefits range from free admission all the way up to being able to attend private presentations to the debut new acquisitions within the museum.

The third and final organization is The Strong located at 1 Manhattan Square also in downtown Rochester. The Strong has evolved over the years during which it has been open. The focus of the organization as it is today is to be a "highly interactive, collections-based museum devoted to the history and exploration of play."<sup>14</sup> The collections of the Strong range from dollhouses and building blocks to the National Toy Hall of Fame and the International Center for the History of Electronic Games.

The Strong was founded by Ms. Margaret Woodbury Strong in 1968, in 1969 she bequeathed her vast estate to support the museum and 1982 a building was opened to house her vast collection of dolls and toys. Much of the growth to the museum happened between 1997 and 2010, where the addition of a 1918 carousel, a 1950s diner, The National Toy Hall of Fame, and

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<sup>13</sup> "Memorial Art Gallery." Memorial Art Gallery. Web. 14 May 2015.

<sup>14</sup> "The Strong, National Museum of Play." The Strong, National Museum of Play. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

doubled its space to be 282,000 square feet. Since then the museum has just been expanding its collection with the addition of the newly formed World Video Game Hall of Fame.<sup>15</sup>

Membership at The Strong has one of the strongest bases from which they pull are parents with young children, but also they are able to also pull from the grandparents of those same families. This broad demographic gives The Strong not one, but two opportunities per family to try and obtain a membership for the organization.

The Strong offers one of the most comprehensive options for its membership. As stated previously, The Strong is able to pull from parents as well as grandparents, hence they have a very large pool of members. Not only does The Strong appeal to a multi-generational audience, but also they are able to be pulled based on such wide topics. The museum has such diversity in the things that it offers that people of all ages would enjoy going not just school age children. With all the different collections that are constantly growing and evolve you never know what you might see there.

There is a dedicated staff member at The Strong who works with membership, who is also in charge of handling the Annual Fund at the museum. This person has to also be working on Annual Fund and other development tasks for the organization. The task of membership resides with in the Development department at The Strong.

The Strong has a membership system that is slightly different than the other organizations. They have two different memberships at flat rates. These two membership options then have three different options imbedded within them. So the benefits are the same, but the cost changes based on the number of children that you would like to include in the membership

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<sup>15</sup> “The Strong, National Museum of Play.” The Strong, National Museum of Play. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.



package. The “Basic” membership starts at \$119 and then goes to \$159 based on the number of children on the membership. The membership level called “Patron” is constructed the same way and ranges from \$160 to \$200. The upper levels at The Strong are not your standard membership levels; they are more focused as membership for donors to The Strong. These levels start at \$250 and go to \$1,000+.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **MAG**

The MAG had an operational budget of \$5,318,428 with 35% of that budget coming from membership and gifts in 2014. That 35% equates to \$1,861,625. The only other source of revenue that the MAG received that was greater than that came from its endowment. The endowment was 39% or \$2,074,382. For 2014 the MAG ended the year with 4,685 members. In comparison to the previous year, the MAG ended the 2013 year with 4,659 members. Twenty-six members were gained in 2014, over the previous year.<sup>16</sup>

Over the course of the last three years income derived from membership contributed to the operational budget has steadily increased from 29% in 2012, 30% in 2013, and then 35% in 2014. Using the operational budget from 2014 with the other year’s contribution percentage, the contribution for 2012 would have only been \$1,542,489, or \$319,135 less than what was contributed in 2014. To compare that with an expense that the MAG had in 2014, they spent \$359,642 on exhibitions. The contribution increase from 2012 to 2014 covered 89% of the

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<sup>16</sup> Patti Giordano, Membership Survey. April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

expense for exhibitions in 2014. If not for that increase that amount would have had to be made up from somewhere else or exhibition expenses would have had to be altered and reduced.<sup>17</sup>

Like all institutions that have a membership program, the MAG has different levels available at which people may join at. Currently they offer nine different levels that start at \$65 and go all the way up to \$10,000+. At each level one receives benefits, the greater your level, the greater the benefits received. For example the most basic level of membership is called an “Individual Membership” and it retails for \$65. Benefits that come along with this membership include: unlimited admission for 1 person, invitation to member preview parties, discount at the Gallery store, local restaurants, creative workshops, and lastly discount ticket price to the M&T Bank Clothesline Festival.

For comparison to the Individual Membership, the “Benefactor” level membership retails at \$600, and the benefits that are part of that level include what’s in the Individual plus; unlimited admission for guest, receive both a digital copy and a printed copy of the ARTiculate, member privileges at over 600 sites internationally, access to specially commissioned prints, and an invitation to either the Fall or Spring Director’s Circle Thank You event. The most expensive and exclusive level of membership at the MAG is the Director’s Circle- Emily Sibley level. To gain access to this level you would be purchasing the membership at \$10,000 or more. In 2014 this membership level only had 4 members, and came with an extensive range of benefits. For a complete list of membership levels and their benefits refer to Table 2 of the Appendix.

A benefit that is shared by all membership levels that changed in 2014 was the Fair Market Value of membership, also known as the tax-deductibility. In 2014, the tax-deductibility of the membership at the MAG was 100%, meaning that when someone paid \$80 for a

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<sup>17</sup> Patti Giordano, Membership Survey. April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

“Family” membership they would be able to claim the full \$80 when they filed their charitable deductions on their taxes the following year. Before 2014 the Fair Market Value of a membership was only 50% of the cost, that same \$80 Family membership could only have been claimed for a value of \$40 when filed. The change in Fair Market Value from face value is because of the value of tickets for preview parties and also the cost of guest admissions. With the start of 2014 the MAG restructured their membership so that now it could be 100% deductible. This was accomplished by making preview parties exclusive to just members and by not letting lower membership level purchase guest passes. Doing those simple things increased the Fair Market Value of each membership and also increased the value of the benefits at the different levels.

Every organization has a cycle for membership peaks and valleys throughout the year, as well as in comparison to adjacent years. The MAG’s fiscal year runs from July 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>, this is in conjunction with the University of Rochester, which the MAG is affiliated with. The biggest peak occurred in September of 2013 with 517 members and the lowest number being 177 members in the month of February in 2014. The peak in September is due to the M&T Bank Clothesline Festival that is held on the grounds of the MAG and that is when the MAG offers its only discount of \$15 on all membership levels and can be applied to a new membership as well as a renewed membership.

A membership is considered “New” if it is actually new, or if it has been at least two years since the previous membership ended. Over the three years examined the MAG had an average of 703 new members a year, broken down annually 692 in 2012, 663 in 2013, and 752 in 2014, that is a total of 8% or 56 member increase from 2012 to 2014. The MAG tracks new membership through 5 main sources: office, on-site, other, website, and workshops. The top two

sources for new members are on-site and the website, they accounted for 66% or 495 of the 752 new members that joined the MAG in 2014. In 2013 and 2012 the website and on-site also accounted for 66% of membership. The remaining 34% came from the office, workshops, and other sources. The top 3 months for new member acquisition are September, March, and April; the low points for new member acquisition were July, November, and February. Over the examined time frame 3 of the 5 sources saw an increase of 90 new members, while on-site and workshops saw a decrease of 39 members from 2012 to 2014.<sup>18</sup>

The other part of membership is renewal, which is when a member pays the membership fee at, above, or below the level that was paid in the previous year. From 2012 to 2014 the MAG saw a decrease of 1% or 40 members who did not renew their membership. Comparing renewal membership annually, we see that from 2012 to 2013 the MAG gained 65 members, but then from 2013 to 2014 the MAG had 105 less members renew, totaling a 40-member loss for the examined time frame. For 2014, 72% of members renewed at the same level as the previous year, 4% renewed at a higher level, 5% downgraded, and the remaining members for 2014 for which they are unaccounted. The reason for unaccounted members is, that a member has three months from when their current membership expires to renewal before they are considered a dropped member. So even though they are technically lapsed members, they are within the three-month grace period so they are still considered members.

The top three months for membership renewal in 2014 were September 2013, March 2014, and May 2014; while the lowest months for membership renewal were July 2013, February 2014, and June 2014. The MAG had about a 74% renewal rating over the 2014 year.

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<sup>18</sup> Patti Giordano, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Memorial Art Gallery, May 7, 2015.

For the 12-month period the highest renewal rating was 78% in January of 2014 and the lowest was in July of 2013. On average for the 2014 year the MAG had an average 84 people who were expected to renew, but did not renew when expected. Of the 3,126 members who renewed their membership in 2014 92%, or 2,885 members, renewed in the same month that their membership was up and expected to renew without loss of coverage, the other 241 members renewed at another point throughout the year.

Obtaining new members and retaining current members comes at a cost, so a budget is allocated each year to maintain and try to increase membership numbers. The main part of the membership budget is spent on acquiring new members and the other part of the budget is spent on retaining current members. In 2012, the MAG had a membership budget of \$52,500, and that is broken down into \$32,500 for acquiring new members and \$20,000 for retaining current members. In 2013, the membership budget sustained a 14% decrease, which equates to around \$7,500 bringing the new budget to \$45,030. That budget amount stayed steady through 2013 and 2014 with the break down between new acquisition and membership renewal being \$28,030 and \$17,000 respectfully.<sup>19</sup>

According to Patti Giorando, the Marketing and Communication Director and the main staff member who works on membership, there are three main reasons why the membership budget has decreased since 2012. The first of those reasons is change in personnel, four years ago there was a membership manager and a membership assistant that both worked full-time, and then there was a second membership assistant that worked part-time. Currently there is no membership manager and both of the membership assistants work only a couple days a week.

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<sup>19</sup> Patti Giordano, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Memorial Art Gallery, May 7, 2015.

The day-to-day duties fall upon two staff members that are in the Marketing and Public Relations department and perform membership duties as secondary tasks. Ms. Giorando mentioned in our May one-on-one interview that she spends maybe 5% to 10% of her time working on membership. The reason for the change in personnel is what leads into the next reason for the decrease in the membership budget; focus.

At the MAG, the focus of membership has changed; membership use to be very specific in trying to get people to join an organization for the benefits that they get from the membership. With the change in personnel, the focus changed from benefits to having the philosophy that “if you build a better museum, people will want to join on there own.” With that new focus, funding is being used to improve other aspects of the museum, such as, marketing, programing, workshops, and other things throughout the museum that will bring people into its doors. Once you have brought the people in and they see how great the museum is they will want to join the MAG on their own. Ms. Giordano further hypothesized that people do not join because of a direct mailer or a request to join, but rather because the place was great and inspired them to join on their own.<sup>20</sup>

The last item that is causing a decrease in the budget dollars allotted towards membership is that many of the materials that once required to be printed and mailed via U.S. Mail to members are now being distributed electronically over the Internet. New letters, publications, and even invitations to member-only parties are now emailed to members. Great expense use to be spent on printing these things and than just as much would be spent on postage to get the hard copy mailers to the members via U.S. Mail.

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<sup>20</sup> Patti Giordano, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Memorial Art Gallery, May 7, 2015.

One of the most interesting findings about the membership budget is that the reduction was not a decision that was forced upon the membership department, but rather it was a choice offered by the MAG employees in an effort to have a reduced budget to work. The staff looked at what was being done, and how it fit within the new focus of “building a better museum” and sought technology that could help reach that goal. Along with that the return on investment with the reduced budget was the same as the return on invest as the expanded budget of 2012. In 2012, for every dollar spent the MAG had a return of \$9, in 2013 they had a return of \$10 for every \$1 spent, and in 2014 they were back to having a \$9 return for every \$1 spent. When comparing ratios the return on investment was steady, but looking at the dollars there is a different interpretation to the story. In 2012 the MAG spent \$20,000 on member renewal and had a 9 to 1 return on investment, totaling \$180,000. In 2014, the MAG spent \$17,000 on member renewal and also had a 9 to 1 return on investment, totaling \$153,000. That is a loss of \$27,000, when you add in the savings of the reduced budget, \$3,000; you are seeing a total \$24,000 loss when comparing 2012 to 2014.<sup>21</sup>

As part of the digital survey and also the one-on-one interview Ms. Giordano was asked: What she thinks is happening with MAG membership? Where is membership heading, and what is causing membership to be the way that it is? When asked what kind of trends she is seeing, her response was, “Membership is moving away from a traditional membership. The younger generations are moving away from the joining atmosphere, they want more options and freedom.” She backs this up with data from 2015, that is about to close, showing that membership numbers are down, but admission to the gallery has seen a significant up swing.

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<sup>21</sup> Patti Giordano, Membership Survey. April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Showing that even though people can do a one-time payment that would give them unlimited access to the Gallery, they are willing to pay as they go instead. In Ms. Giordano's words " Millennials aren't joiners and museums are becoming more of an entertainment destination than educational destination."<sup>22</sup>

## **MAG RECOMMENDATIONS**

The MAG is a long-standing, cultural gem in Rochester, which will surely be around for many years to come. Some recommendations of additions and tweaks to what they are currently doing with membership could lead to increases in membership revenue. With an increase in membership revenue and an increase in the overall bottom line means that more money can be allocated to improving programs and collections, leading to "building a better museum."

The first recommendation to make for the MAG is to create and disseminate a follow-up survey to members who have passed the three-month lapsed grace period and have not renewed their membership. Currently once a member does not renew after the three-month grace period they are not reached out to except when a mass e-mail is sent to everyone in the database. The survey could be a simple e-mail survey and with using an on-line survey platform, it could be easily distributed and collected from the members. An Internet survey platform that is easy to use is SurveyMonkey. Ryan Finley founded SurveyMonkey in 1999. So questions that could be included on the survey would be; level of membership, number of visits, demographic information, and of course the pivotal question that is the whole point of the survey, the reason why an individual decided not to renew. The feedback that you can get from a survey cannot only be used to improve what is all ready in place, but might bring new ideas that were not yet

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<sup>22</sup> Patti Giordano, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Memorial Art Gallery, May 7, 2015.



thought of by museum staff. The use of a survey instrument is also a way to politely remind a lapsed member to renew their membership.

Using a survey platform like SurveyMonkey allows you to create your questions, collect answers, analyze the collected data, and export the needed information. Using this platform would be ideal for an organization like MAG, where membership duties are handled as a secondary task with finite time allocated to endeavors. Once you create the survey, you are able just send it out to different e-mail lists and they will collect all the data for you. To be able to use the survey, as often as need there would be a yearly fee of either \$300 or \$780, depending on benefits that are needed, would be need to paid. That yearly fee though could easily be recouped with getting just a few members to renew that possibly might not have renewed without receiving that survey. An example of a survey is available in Appendix 1.

The second recommendation is to re-create and sustain a Young Professionals Group (YPG). In the past there had been a membership group, but due to lack of leadership the group did not last very long. The majority of the members at the MAG are in the 55+-age range, so it is important that they start building a younger membership base now. With the establishment of a YPG you are not only rebuilding and replenishing your membership base, but you are also allowing yourself access to a group that could than be cultivated to be turned into donors to the museum and become active members of the MAG community in the future. An event that could be held with an YPG would need to be focused toward the 21 to 40 year olds in the Rochester community; one even would be a networking event at a local bar for happy hour. Another event could be a wine or beer tasting at the Gallery. Another way to get a YPG going is to connect with art programs at local universities, host college nights at the gallery that involve reduced admission and membership, while also having special entertainment and events going on.

It is known that doing events cost time and money, but some times you have to spend money to make money and an event can really pay off in the near future. Holding an YPG event could lead to signing up new members plus get additional donations for the MAG. Such a night might cost \$500 for food, venue and entertainment, but could wield 10 new members and raise \$12,000, what would be roughly a 24 to 1 return on investment for the event. Even it was only at 12 to 1 return on investment that would still bring in \$6,000.

The last recommendation to the MAG is do a follow-up or a special mailing to members who haven't renewed for a year or two. If they were a member once, but failed to renew their membership the following year or two, sending an email or a small postcard might get them thinking about renewal. The circumstances that caused them to not renew last year might not exist this year and they do not remember all the things that they cut out. The information is in the database and is not purged at any time, so constructing a simple email or postcard that just extends a special invitation or discount to the a lapsed member to get them back to the Gallery and encouraging them to think about purchasing a membership. It can be a simple "We miss you at the Gallery" or "Where have you been? Come check out what's new at the Gallery".

None of these ideas have to be very expensive or overly time consuming, but each has the possibility to yield a huge impact on membership numbers. Even though the MAG has seen a slight increase in membership numbers over the time frame that was examined, a 0.5% increase over a three-year period is not an increase that will allow for a continued strong supporting membership base that any institution the size of the MAG currently can maintains.

## THE STRONG

The Strong has an operational budget of \$12,000,000 with 15% of that budget coming from membership. This equates to about \$1,800,000 a year. For 2014, The Strong ended with 15,032 members, 16,115 members in 2013, and lastly 16,891 in 2012. Membership at The Strong has seen a steady decline over the past three-years equating to a loss of 1,859 members or an 11% loss in members from 2012 to 2014.<sup>23</sup>

Over the last three years income from membership contributions to The Strong have remained steady at 15%, one of the reasons that this has been possible even with a declining membership count is that there was a membership fee increase in 2013. Also staying constant for the three years of this study was the budget that was allocated to new member acquisition and membership renewal. The membership budget each year totaled \$73,900, breaking down into \$57,500 for acquiring new members and \$16,400 for renewing current members. That budget may be broken down into very specific spending habits.

For new member acquisition, The Strong's main and only official project is the Winter Direct Mail Campaign, which targets 70,000 households in the Rochester, Buffalo, and Syracuse region. With this being the only official way that they acquire new members it is not a surprise that 78% of the over all membership budget is spent on this direct mail campaign. That budget is broken down into the following; \$12,000 for list acquisition, \$18,200 for printing, \$8,300 for mail services, and last \$19,000 is spent on postage. List acquisition refers to going to a List Broker that compiles a mailing list that is targeted based on criteria that they organization has supplied to the broker. Over the last three years Strong has used two different type of list brokers and has yield two different responses, in 2012 and 2013 The list that was used was based from

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Groff, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, The Strong, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

magazine subscriptions and based off of certain zip codes and the presences of child in the household. The list for these years yielded a higher response and also higher membership levels. In 2014 to try a different broker that was also less expensive, they used a broker that collected data strictly from census data and then broke it down with zip codes and income. This list while still effective in raising close to the same revenue as previous years, it was not as effective.<sup>24</sup>

The revenue that was generated the last three years from the Winter Direct Mail Campaign was \$31,000 in 2014, \$34,000 in 2013, and \$61,000 in 2012. The reason for such a high revenue generation in 2012 is that the fields to pair down the list were generalized and the mailer went out to twice as many people as in the following years. The campaign involve 140,000 households in 2012 while in 2013 and 2014 they mailed to half as many household, hence the drop from \$61,000 to \$34,000 from 2012 to 2013. During a one-on-one interview with Jonathan Groff, Director of Membership at The Strong, he shared that in 2012 with the mailing to 140,000 households the budget of \$57,400 was almost completely maxed out, while in 2013 and 2014 they came in between 15% and 20% below budget with mailing to only 70,000 households. That percentage equates to between \$8,615 and \$11,500 of unused funds each year for a total between \$17,250 and \$23,000 combined for 2013 and 2014. If in 2012 they maxed their budget out with mailing to 140,000 households and brought in \$61,000 and than in 2013 you didn't use 15% of the budget, mailed to 70,000 households and brought in only \$34,000, the question must be asked, why wouldn't you maximize the entire budget? With a membership increase in 2012 to \$109 and then again in 2013 to \$119 the households mailed to and the revenue return rate would be higher than what occurred significantly.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Groff, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, The Strong, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Groff, Membership Survey. April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

The cycle of membership at The Strong is very school and weather related, as its main demographic is a child under the age of 10. The highest peak in membership purchase and membership renewals is in the month of February, when schools have their weeklong break. Once February break has occurred and the weather starts to get nice, memberships start to decline due to better weather, being able to be outside, and the opening of other entertain for children such as amusement parks, zoos, and water parks. As summer draws to an end and the weather starts to get chilly and children start getting back into school, membership starts to increase again, with the late fall and early winter showing an increase into the holiday and February break season. Because of that cycle it is difficult for The Strong to be able to track what brings a member back to renew their membership with accuracy.

The budget for renewal of a member is about one-third the amount that the new member budget, is totaling \$16,400, that is broken down into \$4,600 on renewal printing and \$11,800 for mail processing and postage. On average there are 6 communications with a member that are able to be tracked, to try and get them to renew their membership and they occur at the end of their membership. During the second to last month and last month of their membership, the member is sent a letter reminding them that their membership is coming to an end, after the two hard copy letters and a lapse in membership occurs they are sent additional 2 emails. After 2 months of the member having a lapsed membership they are sent a digital survey asking them about their time with The Strong and also asking them why they chose not to renew their membership. The 6<sup>th</sup> and final direct communication with lapsed members are the Winter Direct

Mail Campaign, if a person has not renewed their membership at this time they are included in this mailing<sup>26</sup>. Survey available in Appendix 5.

When asked about the almost 1,900 decline in membership over the last three years, Mr. Groff attributes it to a few different aspects. The main reason is that the least expensive of the membership have surpassed the \$100 mark, and he says, “ Going over \$100 using direct mail is going through the glass ceiling.” Another thing that he says contributes to the decline in membership is that with their demographic, is prone to aging out, or getting to old for the museum, usually occurring in the 10 to 12 years of age range. Lastly, a decline in membership is coming from the fact that The Strong is a major entertainment destination, so not only is it in competition with other museums and zoos, but it is also up against movies, video games, and technology in general. The Membership department at The Strong does feel though that based on the membership cost and local trend that having a membership base between 15,000 and 16,000 is right within projected goals and that at that price point there is good market saturation<sup>27</sup>.

## **STRONG RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Strong is already doing one of the things that is recommended for all membership programs and that is to send a survey to members that have lapsed after a certain time frame. Their survey is 15 questions long and asks just basic questions about the membership, experiences with visiting, and finishes with collecting information about the household. The dissemination of the survey happens via SurveyMonkey once a month and receives a 25% response rate from lapsed members. A recommendation that could easily be enacted comes in

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Groff, Membership Survey. April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Groff, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, The Strong, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

response to the question regarding why the individual did not renew their membership. One of the choices for answers in the question is “I still intend to renew my membership.” Jonathan Groff said, “When we receive this response, it is marked, but no further act is taken.” The suggestion that would be made here is for some extra follow up to occur with this past member that has indicated that they intend to renew. The easiest and least expensive route would be to send a email that includes a thank you for responding to the survey and would also have a link that can be clicked and takes them to a page on The Strong’s website where they can renew their membership. Another option could be that a postcard or letter is sent to that past member, again thanking them for responding to the survey and include membership renewal information. These two options allow for simple and quick follow-up with members that have already stated that they intend to renew, you are just giving them a gentle push with the opportunity to do it when The Strong would like them to renew.

A second recommendation for The Strong comes from the question: If in 2012 you mailed to 140,000 households, and brought in \$61,000 in revenue, and still stayed within budget, why wouldn’t The Strong continue to do that? In 2013, you mailed to 70,000 households, brought in \$34,000 in revenue, and were 15% to 20% under budget, I recommend using the most of the given budget. Being conservative with figures, we will take the 15% part of the under budget, The Strong didn’t use \$8,600 of their member acquisition budget in 2013 compared with 2012; they brought in \$27,000 less revenue. If spending an extra \$8,600 of the budget and getting \$27,000 more in revenue, why wouldn’t The Strong do so? When looking at cost verse dollars raised one sees a 3.1 to 1 return on investment.

When you are an organization that is seeing an 11% decrease in membership over three years, you should not be happy with meeting projected goals. Even if you are reaching projected

goals, you should be striving to keep membership numbers stable, if not increasing them. A goal should be to utilize as much of a given budget, especially if you are consistently getting the same amount without any push back

A third recommendation is to look at drawing a young adult crowd to The Strong. This can be accomplished by utilizing one of the newest additions to the museum, the World Video Game Hall of Fame. This Hall of Fame has access to gaming stations and game from all different years and generations. Hosting an event that can be set up in a tournament style that involves playing retro games and stations like N64's and Sega's that would draw young adults who grew up with those gaming stations. Events like this could be held monthly and each month could be a different gaming station.

An event like this not only will draw in families, but it will draw in people that might just be starting out building families. It will plant the seed that I enjoyed these things when I was growing up, as a child and I want my child to be able to experience them too. A way to push membership at events like this would be to offer either a discount entry to the tournament or maybe a discount membership to the museum. With the young families that come to the event while one is playing in the tournament the other adult can take their child around the museum and be able to experience everything that The Strong has to offer.

Summary of recommendations, include: 1. Continue with the digital survey, but do follow-up with members who mark that they intend to still renew their membership. 2. Utilize all of your given budget. The slight extra amount spent could lead to a much larger return. 3. Come up with events that get young adults and emerging families involved in the museum. Show them that the museum is not just for their children, but that it can be fun for them too. With these simple additions the already large membership base could start to grow again.



## **SENECA PARK ZOO**

The Seneca Park Zoo (SPZ) has an operational budget of \$5,300,00 with an average of 49% coming from membership and admissions. SPZ combines membership and admission together because membership is worked heavily through the admission department. Over the last three years membership has seen an up and a down, from 2012 to 2013 there was an increase of 1,005 membership at the SPZ, and then from 2013 to 2014 there was a decrease of 1,608 members. The three years see an average 17,650 members, annually that breaks down to 17,516 in 2012, 18,521 in 2013, and lastly 16,913 in 2014<sup>28</sup>.

The 49% average contribution to the operational budget comes from a 5% decrease of the three years; annually the contributions have been 51% in 2012, 50% in 2013, and 46% in 2014. With the decrease in contribution to the operational budget, there has also been a decrease of 11% or \$301,173 between 2012 and 2014 to the budget for membership and admissions. For the years that were examined there was a budget for membership renewal but there was no budget for new member acquisition. This is because prior to 2015 the SPZ's focus was on bringing people through the gates and not on getting new members. Membership at the SPZ is broken down into six levels, and range in cost from \$52 to \$300 as of the end of 2014. In 2015, a new level called the "Partners in Conservation" was added and is handled by the Development department. Benefits and cost for the six different levels can be seen on Table 3.

Renewal of members has been the main focus of membership at the SPZ. From the start of 2012 to the end of 2014, SPZ saw a decrease of 3,013 members, but when comparing the end of 2012 to the end of 2014 you only have a decrease of 603 members. In 2013, there was peak in

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<sup>28</sup> Chuck Levengood, Membership Survey, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

membership, with a total of 18,521 memberships, a 1005 addition over 2012. In 2014 though they lost 1608 members. The increase in 2013 is explained by the final and complete opening of the new “Step into Africa” exhibit. With the final opening of this exhibit it drew more people to the SPZ and they became members, but since there was no new addition in 2014 there was nothing that drew some of them back. This is backed by Chuck Levensgood, Director of Development, who says that they are hoping that with the new addition of 2 new elephants in 2015 there should be some recovery to the 1,608 members that were lost from 2013 to 2014. Also with the new focus of not only getting people in the gates, but also getting new members he sees membership numbers steadily increasing over the coming years<sup>29</sup>.

When the SPZ is in the process of renewing a member there are four communications that occur with that member, they start before the membership is even up. The first is a sent to the member three months before their membership due date, and then a letter is sent every month till it is up. If the member does not renew their membership by the end of the year their membership covers, they enter into an area of flux for 6 months. After six months they are then considered a “dropped member” and they will receive the forth letter to try and get a renewal. Untrack-able forms of communication that help with renewal are; radio ads, newspaper ads, Facebook, Twitter, and event announcements. The reason that they are untrack-able is because unlike a letter that is address and sent directly to a member those things are just an in passing notice by the SPZ, so there is no true guarantee that a member will see these media placements.

When Mr. Levensgood was asked about membership at the SPZ and also membership in general he responded with “ That most people that are looking to get a membership for a family are trying to get the most bang for their buck. Value of a membership is what is most important

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<sup>29</sup> -Chuck Levensgood, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Seneca Park Zoo, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

to them.” This falls into the very same path that both the MAG and also The Strong had in regards to what is happening with membership. Mr. Levengood also said “Not only is the SPZ going up against other area zoos, but it is up against places like The Strong and also the amusement park Seabreeze.” The SPZ is trying to cram 12 months of membership into a time frame of about six to eight months, mainly due to that to see most of the animals well you have to be outside to see them and winter in Rochester does not really allow that to happen with the temperatures and amount of snow that they receive. Even though the SPZ is open January through December, 95% of the activities that occur at the SPZ happen between the months of late April and Late October when the weather is nicer and warmer, allowing people to come to the SPZ.<sup>30</sup>

## **SENECA PARK ZOO RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for SPZ are very similar to the MAG, the reason for that is that they both have very similar programs running and are both lacking in roughly the same areas. Minor tweaks would need to occur so that they can be properly tailored to the SPZ.

The starting recommendation for the SPZ is to use SurveyMonkey and create a follow-up survey to its members who have lapsed the grace period and have not renewed their membership. To tailor the survey to the SPZ questions that could be included on the survey would be; level of membership, demographic information, the reason why an individual decided not to renew, and what they thinking can be done to improve. To be able to use the survey, as often as need there would be a yearly fee of either \$300 or \$780, depending on benefits that are needed, would be need to paid. This yearly fee though could easily be recouped with getting just a few members to

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<sup>30</sup> -Chuck Levengood, interviewed by Joshua Stapf, Seneca Park Zoo, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

renew that possibly might not have renewed without receiving that survey. An example of a survey in Appendix 1.

The SPZ host an event once a month during the Summer time called “ZooBrew”; this event brings local breweries and local entertainment to the zoo and is a 21+ only event. This is a great start to try and get the younger generations to come to the SPZ. The only thing is that at this event there is no focus on trying to get membership sign ups. The experience that you get at ZooBrew is not only the drinking and entertainment but also it also being able to do all that within the SPZ. To go along with this event you might try creating an event that is more tailored to a specific crowd rather than just a general 21+ age group. Forming a Young Professionals Group just like the MAG would need to do will help bring in and keep the young adults that are just starting to form families in the area.

The last recommendation to the SPZ is do a follow-up or special mailing with members that haven't renewed for a year or two. If they were a member once, but haven't renewed their membership the following year or two, sending them an email or a small postcard might get them thinking about renewing. The circumstances that caused them to not renew last year might not exist this year and they do not remember all the things that they cut out. The information is in the database and is not purged at any time, so constructing a simple email or postcard that just extends a special invitation or discount to the a lapsed member to get them back to the SPZ and encouraging them to think about purchasing a membership.

To summarize the recommendations for the SPZ is that they create a survey for members that have lapsed on renewing their memberships. Second, try to get more young adult events happening at the SPZ or create a Young Professionals Group for the SPZ. Lastly, create a special mailer for members who have not renewed in a year or two, with maybe offering a

special discount to them. The SPZ is already doing the biggest thing that they could do to increase their membership and that is focusing for the first time on obtaining new members. That will increase overall membership revenue right from the start of the process, and after they become members, the task will be keeping them on as members in the following years.

## **CHALLENGES**

Besides looking into the organization's annual reports and 990 forms, information for a study such as this, needs to be drawn from the membership departments of each organization. To do that the researcher had a couple different options: 1. Set-up in person interviews with each of the organizations. 2. Create an email that had questions on it and send that to each of the organizations. 3. Create a survey, going with option number three where an Internet survey platform called SurveyMonkey was used to disseminate the questions. This allows the researcher to create a multi-question survey with different types of questions for anyone to answer and then it collects and stores the data for the researcher to review

When looking for a viable survey platform, there were a couple different options on the Internet, going with SurveyMonkey made things easier on the researchers end but, also on the end of the survey recipient. With SurveyMonkey you are able to select a variety of pre-structured questions that made creating the survey quick and easy. Another aspect of SurveyMonkey that was great was that once the survey was sent out to the people whose email addresses you entered the site did all the tracking of data. All that had to be done was go into the site, select the survey and then click on analyze data and look at each person's responses for each of the questions. The look of the survey was important to me because this survey was going out into the professional world and needed to look put together and professional. The only downfall with using SurveyMonkey is that do to a survey that is more than 10 questions you need to purchase a

membership with them. To get a round this it was decided to take my 15-question survey and split it into two different surveys, a part 1 and a part 2.

Coming up with the questions for the survey was the next biggest challenge for the survey because you don't want the people that would be answering the questions to look at the question and think to themselves that the answer to this question could have been found in our annual report or on our website. To take care of that issue, preliminary research needed to be performed so that information that was already available to the researcher was not asked. The survey needed to be direct and simple, yet allow for the ability to receive detailed information.

Once the survey was constructed and sent out it all came down to waiting for the responses. Even though each of the people that were receiving the survey did have knowledge that it was on its way there was no way to know exactly how quickly they would be able to get back to the researcher. In the email that had the link to the survey it was requested that they please try and respond to the survey within ten days thus allowing two business weeks to respond to the fifteen questions that were included in the survey. After waiting for the responses to the survey, the data needed to be organized to properly be able to compare between organizations and also to see if any trends that were forming.

Following the review of the survey data it was determined that a follow up in person interview would be needed with each of the organizations. The reason for this is was to get clarification on data, collect more data, and to get an opinion from the person that handles membership on if there is anything that might have been missed. Setting up appointments with each of the organizations was a challenge because you could suggest days and times that would work best for me but in the end, you have to make sure that you go with what would be easiest and most convenient for the professional that you are meeting with, as they were taking time out

of their busy schedules to meet with the researcher. Even though a meeting with each organization was held when it was easiest for them, a plan on when to meet with them based on the data that was originally collected from the survey was still created.

The most complete and competent data received via the survey came from the MAG, so they were going to be my last organization to meet with. The first organization that to setup a meeting with was The Strong and then the SPZ and again lastly, the MAG would follow them. Each meeting lasted about forty five to seventy five minutes are generate even more valuable data and additional questions that would be asked at the next organization. The meetings were originally just seen as a basic follow up and clarification step, but they all turned into opportunities for further exploration.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the last three years museums and collecting institutions in the Rochester region have been seeing a decrease in the amount of people that are signing up for memberships. When comparing Rochester numbers to national numbers we see that they do not line up with each other. Nationally membership is increasing while two of three organizations that were looked at in this thesis had major declines and the third had an almost non-existent increase. When comparing to similar institutions nationally we are able to see exactly the difference.

When comparing the Memorial Art Gallery to art museums nationally we see that both are staying at a stable level. The 2014 Cultural Attraction Trend Reports says that art museums are seeing a stable yet .5% decrease in membership, while the MAG is seeing a .5% increase that is seen as being stable. Both The Strong and the SPZ have seen an 11% decrease over the last year which in comparison to national averages. Nationally children's museums have seen a

10.6% increase in membership from 2012 to 2014, while The Strong has seen a 11% decrease, meaning they are drastically below the national trend. The SPZ with an 11% decrease is being compared to a 5.6% increase nationally at zoos.

With a few additions to what each organization, they will easily be able to meet and surpass national averages. The SPZ has already started to work on getting higher numbers by starting to focus on obtaining new members for the first time in 2015. The MAG is already a head by having a slight increase in membership. The Strong might need to have more than minor changes to its membership program to get back on track. The addition of better member follows up, Young Professional Groups, and maximizing budgets is a great start for all three organizations.

A recommendation to all three organizations is that even with the reduction of budget and personnel, membership is always going to play an important part in your organization. Doing what has been done and works in the past is not always going to be the best practices. Take a step back and evaluate how things are going within your given organization, and if needed get an consultant to come in and take a look to help out. Changes need to be made so that the trend in declining membership is halted and reversed. No organization can survive for a long time with a consistent loss of 10+% of their membership base each year.



## Appendix 1. Survey Questions Disseminated via Survey Monkey on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

1. What % of the Organization's operational budget comes from Membership?  
In 2014?  
In 2013?  
In 2012?
2. What was the total # of members?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
3. What is the breakdown of members?
4. What is the budget for membership renewal?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
5. What is the budget for membership acquisition?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
6. What is the budget spent on?
7. What was the return on invest for membership?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
8. How does renewal compare to acquisition for dollars spent to dollars raised?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
9. What are perks and donor premiums of being a member?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
10. How do the perks of being a Member influence the fair market value and the tax deductibility of the membership price?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
11. What is the average # of communications to renew a Member?  
For 2014?  
For 2013?  
For 2012?
12. What is the average # of communications to acquire a New Member?
13. What forms of communication are used with Members?  
Gift Shop  
Point of Sale  
Direct Mail  
Email  
Facebook  
Twitter  
In Person/ Peer to Peer
14. Are List Brokers used to acquire New Members? What criteria do you use?
15. What trends do you see in membership? Concerns? Improvements?

## Appendix 2. Survey Answers for Memorial Art Gallery

1. What % of the organization's operational budget comes from membership for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- 35%
  - b. For 2013? ----- 30%
  - c. For 2012? ----- 29%
2. What is the total # of members for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- 4685
  - b. For 2013? ----- 4659
  - c. For 2012? ----- 4664
3. What is the Breakdown of Members by levels for: ----- Question Skipped
4. What is the budget for membership renewal for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- \$17,000
  - b. For 2013? ----- \$17,000
  - c. For 2012? ----- \$20,000
5. What is the budget for membership acquisition for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- \$28,030
  - b. For 2013? ----- \$28,030
  - c. For 2012? ----- \$32,500
6. How is that Budget spent? ----- Collateral Pieces, Postage, Additional Mailed Pieces
7. What is the return on investment for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- 9 to 1
  - b. For 2013? ----- 10 to 1
  - c. For 2012? ----- 9 to 1
8. How does renewal compare to acquisition for dollars spent to dollars raised:
  - a. For 2014? ----- Renewal is better
  - b. For 2013? ----- Renewal is better
  - c. For 2012? ----- Renewal is better
9. What are perks and donor premiums of being a member? ----- See Benefits Chart
10. How do the perks of being a Member influence the fair market value and the tax deductibility of the membership price for:
  - a. For 2014? ----- 100% deductibility
  - b. For 2013? ----- ~50% deductibility
  - c. For 2012? ----- ~50% deductibility
11. What is the average # of communications to renew a Member? Average # of communications to acquire new members?
  - a. Renew? ----- 1 to 3
  - b. New Members? ----- No direct mail
12. Forms of Communication: New Members, Loyal Members
  - a. Direct Mail ----- New Members, Renew Members
  - b. Email ----- New Members, Renewed Members
  - c. Facebook ----- New Members, Renewed Members
  - d. In Person/ Peer to Peer ----- New Members, Renewed Members
13. Are list brokers used to acquire new members? ----- List brokers are ineffective
14. What trends do you see in membership? Concerns? Improvements? ----- People are moving away from traditional memberships

### Appendix 3. Survey Answers for the Seneca Park Zoo

1. What % of the Organization's operational budget comes from Membership?  
In 2014? ----- 46%  
In 2013? ----- 50%  
In 2012? ----- 51%
2. What was the total # of members?  
For 2014? ----- 16913  
For 2013? ----- 18521  
For 2012? ----- 17516
3. What is the breakdown of members? ----- Question Skipped
4. What is the budget for membership renewal?  
For 2014? ----- \$2,418,971  
For 2013? ----- \$2,650,510  
For 2012? ----- \$2,720,144
5. What is the budget for membership acquisition? ----- N/A
6. What is the budget spent on? ----- Mailers, Postage, Collateral Pieces
7. What was the return on invest for membership?  
For 2014? ----- N/A  
For 2013? ----- N/A  
For 2012? ----- N/A
8. How does renewal compare to acquisition for dollars spent to dollars raised? ----- Question Skipped
9. What are perks and donor premiums of being a member?  
For 2014? ----- See Chart  
For 2013? ----- See Chart  
For 2012? ----- See Chart
10. How do the perks of being a Member influence the fair market value and the tax deductibility of the membership price?  
For 2014? ----- 50%  
For 2013? ----- 50%  
For 2012? ----- 50%
11. What is the average # of communications to renew a Member?  
For 2014? ----- 4  
For 2013? ----- 4  
For 2012? ----- 4
12. What is the average # of communications to acquire a New Member? ----- N/A
13. What forms of communication are used with Members?  
Gift Shop  
Point of Sale  
Direct Mail  
Email  
Facebook  
Twitter  
In Person/ Peer to Peer  
-----Plus Radio, City Newspaper, and Democrat and Chronicle
14. Are List Brokers used to acquire New Members? What criteria do you use?----- First year used was 2015. Pulled zip codes based on information from Membership Database
15. What trends do you see in membership? Concerns? Improvements? ----- Members are looking for the most bang for their buck. They are looking for the greatest value for their lifestyle.

#### Appendix 4. Survey Answers for The Strong

1. What % of the Organization's operational budget comes from Membership?  
In 2014? ----- 15%  
In 2013? ----- 15%  
In 2012? ----- 15%
2. What was the total # of members?  
For 2014? ----- 15,032  
For 2013? ----- 16,115  
For 2012? ----- 16,891
3. What is the breakdown of members?  
For 2014? ----- Regular Level- 14,979, Upper Level- 53  
For 2013? ----- Regular Level- 16,052, Upper Level- 63  
For 2012? ----- Regular Level- 16,835, Upper Level- 56
4. What is the budget for membership renewal? ----- \$16,400  
\$4,600 Renewal printing, \$11,800 Mail processing and postage
5. What is the budget for membership acquisition? ----- \$57,500 each year for the last 3 years  
\$12,000 List acquisition, \$8,300 Mail Services, \$18,200 Printing, \$19,000 Postage
6. What is the budget spent on? ----- Printing, Mail Processing, Postage
7. What was the return on invest for membership?  
For 2014? ----- Covered cost plus generated additional \$31,000  
For 2013? ----- Covered cost plus generated additional \$34,400  
For 2012? ----- Covered cost plus generated additional \$66,000
8. How does renewal compare to acquisition for dollars spent to dollars raised? ----- Hard to compare because there are so many ways a member can come to us. Direct mail is the most expensive. Email/Facebook/twitter are cheaper. Onsite sales are the cheapest.
9. What are perks and donor premiums of being a member? ----- See Chart
10. How do the perks of being a Member influence the fair market value and the tax deductibility of the membership price? ----- Membership at the basic and patron levels are not tax deductible. Benefactor (<50%), Sustaining (<50%), and Leading (~66%) are tax deductible.
11. What is the average # of communications to renew a Member?  
For 2014? ----- 6- 2 letters, 2 emails, Expired Member Survey, Direct Mailer  
For 2013? ----- 6- 2 letters, 2 emails, Expired Member Survey, Direct Mailer  
For 2012? ----- 6- 2 letters, 3 emails, Expired Member Survey, Direct Mailer
12. What is the average # of communications to acquire a New Member? ----- 1-Direct Mailer
13. What forms of communication are used with Members? ----- All channels are used to contact New and Renewed Members.  
Gift Shop  
Point of Sale  
Direct Mail  
Email  
Facebook  
Twitter  
In Person/ Peer to Peer
14. Are List Brokers used to acquire New Members? What criteria do you use? ----- Yes, Look at zip codes, income, and presence of children in the home
15. What trends do you see in membership? Concerns? Improvements? ----- There is much greater competition for a family's limited resources. Higher cost of living impacts a family's ability to afford a membership.

Appendix 5. Copy of The Strong's Lapsed Member Survey

**Membership**

**\*1. What level of membership did you have with The Strong?**

Family

Grandparent

Patron/Patron Family, Patron-Grandparent

**\*2. How many years were you a member?**

This was our first year of membership

1-2 years

3-4 years

5-7 years

8-10 years

More than 10 years

I don't know

**\*3. What was the primary reason you did not renew your membership?**

My children or grandchildren are still young but have little interest in coming

My children or grandchildren have outgrown the museum

It was not financially possible to continue our membership

I still intend to renew my membership

We did not come often enough to justify the cost of membership

**\*4. On a scale of 0 to 10, indicate how likely it is that you would recommend The Strong to a family member, friend, or neighbor. (0=not likely at all, 5=neutral, and 10=extremely likely)**

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

## Visitation

**\*1. How many times have you or your family visited the museum in the past 12 months?**

- Have not visited in the last 12 months
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6-12 times
- Average 1-2 times per month
- Average more than twice a month

**2. When you visit the museum, who in your family typically goes?**

- Mother with 1-2 children
- Mother with 3 children
- Mother with 4+ children
- Father with 1-2 children
- Father with 3 children
- Father with 4+ children
- Grandparent(s) with 1-2 children
- Grandparent(s) with 3 children
- Grandparents (s) with 4+ children
- Caregiver or other family member with 1-2 children
- Caregiver or other family member with 3 children
- Caregiver or other family member with 4+ children
- Both parents with children
- Some other combination of adults and children
- Don't know

**3. Besides your immediate family members, do you typically come with anyone else to the museum?**

- No, typically just immediate family members
- I typically bring guests from out of town
- I typically bring grandparents with us to visit the museum
- I typically come with local friends or other family members to the museum

**4. On average, how long is your family's typical visit to The Strong?**

- Less than one hour
- One to two hours
- Two to four hours
- More than four hours
- I don't know

## About You

This final series of questions will be used for demographic and classification purposes.

**1. What is your zip code?**

zip:

**2. What is your gender?**

- Female  
 Male

**3. How many adults reside in your household?**

**4. How many children reside in your household or how many grandchildren do you have?**

**5. If you have children in your household, please type the number of children you have in each of the following age categories.**

Under 2 years	<input type="text"/>
2-5 years	<input type="text"/>
6-8 years	<input type="text"/>
9-12 years	<input type="text"/>
13+ years	<input type="text"/>

**6. If you are a grandparent, please type the number of grandchildren you have in each of the following age categories.**

Under 2 years	<input type="text"/>
2-5 years	<input type="text"/>
6-8 years	<input type="text"/>
9-12 years	<input type="text"/>
13+ years	<input type="text"/>

**7. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?**



**Table 1. List of Seneca Park Zoo Member Benefits as of April 24, 2015. Table created by author.**

Members Benefits	Individual	Couple	Family	Grandparents	Penguin Circle	Otter Circle
	\$52	\$67	\$95	\$90	\$150	\$300
Free admission for 1 named adult	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free admission for a second named adult		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free admission for all member's children (18 and under)			✓		✓	✓
Free admission for all member's grandchildren (18 and under)				✓	✓	✓
End the Zoo at 9:30 a.m.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50% off admission to more than 170 zoos and aquariums in North America	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ZooNoos mailed to your home	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% discount at the ZooShop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% discount at Eagle's Landing Café and Crater Canteen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bonus Benefits (discount at area businesses)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discount fees on select events, like ZooBoo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitation to various member events by level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discounts on classes, camps, and birthday parties)			✓	✓	✓	✓
Two exclusive member T-shirts					✓	✓
Ability to bring two guest each visit					✓	✓
One-time use 25% off coupons for ZooShop					✓	✓
Opportunity for behind-the-barrier group tours						✓
<b>ADD-ONS</b>						
\$40: Add-A-Guest: Bring an additional guest each visit						
\$35: Add-A-Caregiver: Named caregiver can bring member's children without member present						
#10: Member T-shirt: Exclusive member T-shirt						
\$5: Child Card: Additional card with child's name						

**Table 2. List of Memorial Art Gallery Member Benefits as of April 24, 2015. Table created by author.**

Member Benefits	Individual	Family	Reciprocal	Patron	Benefactor	Director Circle-Winslow Homer	Director's Circle-Georgia O'Keeffe	Director's Circle-Claude Monet	Director's Circle-Emily Sibley
	\$65	\$80	\$150	\$300	\$600	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$6,000	\$10,000+
Unlimited general admission, including guests	1	2	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitations to VIP Reception at Member Preview parties		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% Gallery Store discount	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% discount at participating area restaurants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% Creative Workshop discount; priority registration period	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to MAG for children's birthday parties		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
M&T Bank Clothesline Festival admission discount	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>ARTiculate</i> mailed plus digital subscription	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Borrowing privileges at the MAG library	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reciprocal member privileges at nearly 600 sites			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to specially commissioned Patron Print				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discount on rental of Gallery facilities, including Vanden Brul Pavilion (restrictions apply)						✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitations to a Fall and Spring thank you lecture and reception					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Two additional free tickets to ticketed exhibitions (total of six tickets)							✓	✓	✓
Complimentary copies of Gallery-produced publications						✓	✓	✓	✓
Private docent-led tour of the Gallery (by appointment)						✓	✓	✓	✓

Member Benefits	Individual	Family	Reciprocal	Patron	Benefactor	Director Circle-Winslow Homer	Director's Circle-Georgia O'Keeffe	Director's Circle-Claude Monet	Director's Circle-Emily Sibley
	\$65	\$80	\$150	\$300	\$600	\$1,500	\$3,000	\$6,000	\$10,000+
Annual special event with the Director							✓	✓	✓
Individual acknowledgement for an annual exhibition in the Lockhart Gallery							✓	✓	✓
Family level gift memberships							1	2	2
Access to Gallery facilities for a private event								✓	✓
Invitation to an annual trip with the Director (within 100-mile radius)								✓	✓
Your name listed as sponsor of an artwork on view in the Gallery's collection (limitations apply)									✓
Invitation to dinner with the Director, curator, special guest									✓
Opportunity to attend a special presentation for a new acquisition for the Gallery's collection									✓

**Table 3. List of The Strong Member Benefits as of April 24, 2015. Table created by author.**

Member Benefits	Basic	Basic 5	Basic 6	Patron	Patron 5	Patron 6	Benefactor	Sustaining	Leading
	\$119	\$139	\$159	\$160	\$180	\$200	\$250	\$500	\$1,000+
Adult Admission	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Children Admission	4	5	6	4	5	6	4	4	4
Carousel/Train Punch Card	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
\$1 discount on Guest admission	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
\$1 discount on Butterfly Garden	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10% discount in Museum Shop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Members Newsletter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Museum Admission Tickets				4	4	4		2	5
One-time use general admission							6	6	6
Dancing Butterfly Garden Tickets				4	4	4			
One-time use Butterfly Garden Admission							6	8	12
ACM Reciprocal Network Benefit: 50% off General admission for up to 6 at participating museums				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free Carousel/ Train rides							4	4	4
One-time 25% off coupon for Museum Shop							✓	✓	✓
Private tour for up to 10 people								✓	✓
Invitation to exclusive engagements								✓	✓
Complimentary Family Membership									1
Add-ons									
\$35- Add-a-Guest									
\$35- Nanny Card									

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