

The ROI of Active Association Participation

Association participation pays dividends

Association volunteers at all levels give a huge amount of time, talent and resources to the industry. This is done with the support and encouragement of their companies. For a company to make this strong commitment from its corporate leadership down to the local maintenance staff, the return on investment is substantial. To understand what companies see on the upside that allows this commitment I interviewed a number of owner/manger and product/service leaders on what they get in return. In my interviews each one touched on virtually every one of the following points.

Published Industry Statistics

Published industry statistics are needed, but they will not replace the information gathered in meeting with your peers while doing association work. Cindi Scoggins, executive vice president for property management at Westdale Asset Management, explains that her superiors are supportive of her association activity. "They are grateful that I can be part of the association and bring back information that is useful, be it at the political level or just the networking with peers from other companies and seeing what REALLY is going on out there." The ability to get real-time information from your peers before it has been sorted and categorized is essential.

Relationship Development

Multifamily is a very large industry, but in the sense of the close-knit relationships that develop, it is small. This is as true and as important for the product and services member as it is for the owner manager member. Jim Melson, CEO of ClientConnect, says that successful business development in multifamily extends beyond trade show booths, sponsorships and advertising.

"Active participation in association work by representatives of your company demonstrates commitment to the entire industry's goals," Melson says. "The relationships you build take you out of the maze of logos and messages. There is no substitute for a reputation as an involved industry leader. Most owner/managers seek to do business with those they know, trust and share common interests – all of which are results of active association involvement."

Legislative Issues

The impact of local, state and national legislation is direct and powerful. Through an active role in our associations at all levels your company can be proactive in the legislative arena. Brad Williams, regional vice president for Lincoln Property Company and current TAA president, says, "The ability of my company to take part in local, state and national legislative issues is a critical part of our involvement. This gives our company a voice in deciding the direction of the industry legislative affairs." TAA is currently working to encourage apartment residents to become more involved in political issues through a concentrated voter registration drive.

Management Skill Development

Active members of the associations have the opportunities for their staffs to serve in various servant leadership roles. Bob Bentel, director of asset management, Archon Group Deutschland, explains that servant leadership builds stronger staffs. "The exposure and involvement helps younger folks gain a sense of comfort and confidence in reporting/presenting to a group," Bentel says. "It also enhances a person's ability to meet deadlines, interact with and build teams. Coming to a meeting prepared, informed and confident is critically important in all our companies."

Changing Environment

Multifamily is an ever-changing environment; local, regional and national markets are constantly evolving. You must position your company to be aware of these changes. Tony Pusateri, senior vice president for property services with Equity Residential Trust, says, "Our involvement at all levels of association work gives us the ability to use the information we gather to predict and anticipate global property management changes."

Business Development

Active participation in association activities gives a company positive exposure in its marketplace and is a tool for business development. Mary Gwyn, president of the North Carolina Apartment Association, says,

"The kind of exposure that my company, Apartment Dynamics, receives give us a name and reputation in the market that makes it more recognized when hiring or meeting with prospective clients." Working for the good of the industry is good for business.

Association Initiatives

Associations at every level across the county are involved in all types of initiatives, from public services projects to voter registration drives. Steve Lamberti, president and chief operating officer for Milestone Management, says, "As an active member of your associations, your company has a voice in the selection of these initiatives and active participation in the events." This gives a positive public face and public awareness to the association and your company as well.

Solutions to Everyday Issues

The willingness of members to share experiences with their peers has been a hallmark of association membership. Ron Shelton, vice president for Amalgamated Management Corp., says "Some of the return on investment companies receive is that they get an inside view of up to date industry issues, which help their strategic planning...They get tools or information to help with potential litigious events and a variety of ideas and proven solutions to everyday operational issues."

It is clear that for these successful companies the ROI of active association involvement goes far beyond the access to the TAA lease and education programs. If you are not taking advantage of your membership you are minimizing your association membership ROI.

Larry Duncan, CAMTII, CAS, CAPS emeritus is a consultant on association marketing and has served many years on the TAA Board of Directors and numerous TAA committees. He is a past chairman of the NAA National Suppliers Council and is a NAAEI Instructor. He was the recipient of the 1994 TAA Rita Kirby Award and the 2008 TAA Olin Steele Award You can contact Larry at larryleeduncan@lduncantx.com