Introduction

Association’s stakeholders have access to a huge amount of information and now more than ever before they need proof that the information they are absorbing is reliable and authentic. Research has never been more important for Associations, but what are they currently doing, and what are their future plans?

AAE conducted a survey to discover which associations are conducting research, who they are researching with and what they are using their findings for. We also investigated what the likelihood of them conducting research in the future and how much budget and resource they are setting aside for this.

Who are Associations researching with?

- **100%** Members
- **21%** Members
- **43%** Operating in the Industry
- **15%** General Population
- **10%** Government
- **19%** Staff
- **24%** Sponsor or Partner Organisations
- **12%** Other

What are the biggest barriers to research in Associations?

- **23%** Lack of available resources
- **30%** Lack of budget
- **7%** Unable to get sponsorship/funding
- **30%** Used other sources of research/data
- **30%** Haven’t felt there was any need
- **15%** Other

How many primary research studies have Associations undertaken in the last year?

- **≤1** 8%
- **2-5** 8%
- **6-10** 9%
- **11-20** 10%
- **21-50** 11%
- **≥51** 23%

What research are associations conducting, now and in the future?

- **Past**
  - Measuring key performance indicators of your members’ sector/profession: 31%
  - Exploring current ‘hot’ issues or topics relevant to members: 60%
  - Feedback from your members on the performance of your organisation and services: 40%
  - Understanding brand awareness of your organisation: 23%

- **Future**
  - Measuring key performance indicators of your members’ sector/profession: 45%
  - Exploring current ‘hot’ issues or topics relevant to members: 40%
  - Feedback from your members on the performance of your organisation and services: 60%
  - Understanding brand awareness of your organisation: 50%

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Who did associations outsource their research to?

- **46%** A research agency
- **13%** A member organisation
- **11%** An individual member
- **6%** An educational establishment
- **25%** An agency
- **9%** An institute

What % of outsourced research was funded by the Association?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Last Year</th>
<th>Next Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>76-99%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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What styles of research are Associations using?

- **100%** Survey by email/online forum
- **29%** Surveys face-to-face at events
- **33%** Interview questions by phone
- **46%** Qualitative discussions/questions by phone/faceto-face
- **43%** Focus groups
- **10%** Other

Association research spend past and future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spend in GBP</th>
<th>Last year</th>
<th>Next year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1,000</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,000 to 5,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6,000 to 10,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>11,000 to 20,000</td>
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<td>21,000 to 50,000</td>
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<td>51,000 to 100,000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100,000</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What purpose have Associations used research & will in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
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Are research expectations being met?

- 16% Partly met
- 4% Don't know
- 9% Exceeded
- 16% Fully met
- 5% Didn't know

Comparison: Purposes associations have used and plan to use research

International & European Associations

UK and Other National Associations

Analysis by association type

Are they conducting research?

- Scientific associations and institutes:
  - 80% Yes
  - With 50% citing lack of research and the remaining 50% citing the use of other resources and no need

- Professional associations:
  - 96% Yes
  - With 100% citing lack of resource as the reason not to be able to conduct research

- Associations of associations/federations:
  - 75% Yes
  - Lack of budget, resource and sponsorship all cited as reasons not to conduct research

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Survey Respondent demographic

Association sectors
- Professional, scientific and technical activities - 15%
- Human health and social work activities - 14%
- Other service activities - 14%
- Construction - 8%
- Transportation and storage - 8%
- Financial and insurance activities - 7%
- Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles - 6%
- Information and communication - 4%
- Manufacturing - 4%
- Arts, entertainment and recreation - 4%

Type of organisation
- Professional body - 32%
- Educational organisations - 24%
- Other scientific/learned organisation - 9%
- Other individual member organisation - 9%
- Association of companies/governments/Federation of other associations - 9%

Membership regions
- National - UK - 39%
- International - 28%
- Europe - 19%
- Other - 8%

Membership size by type

Individual member organisations
- More than 5000 - 51%
- 30000 - 50000 - 9%
- 100000 plus - 6%
- 10000 - 100000 - 9%
- 50000 - 100000 - 8%
- 0 - 10000 - 17%

Company member organisations
- 0 - 100 - 38%
- 100 - 500 - 38%
- 500 - 1000 - 16%
- 1000 - 5000 - 9%
- 5000+ - 3%

Association member organisations
- Less than 100 - 97%
- More than 100 - 3%

Number of employees
- <10 - 46%
- 10 - 19 - 20%
- 20 - 29 - 12%
- 30 - 39 - 7%
- 40+ - 15%

Main role
- Executive Head/Secretary General/CEO/Managing Director - 48%
- Chair/President - 2%
- Board member - 2%
- Other - 12%
- Director - 12%
- Manager - 23%
- Other staff - 11%
- Other volunteer - 2%

This survey was responded by 82 association executive members of AAE
Summary

Whilst research is clearly highly valued and recognised by many respondents as key when developing strategies and providing fact based evidence to support decisions and positions, there are still challenges for associations when conducting research, which leads to uncertainty.

Challenges cited in our research suggest that the two biggest problems that organisations face when conducting and utilising research is firstly low response rates and secondly acting on the research results.

However when successful research is cited as being one of the greatest member benefits, generating useful, authentic content and providing a sound basis for future developments.

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