

## Gauging Interest Part 1: Survey Questionnaire

Knowing who is the target audience for this club was a crucial factor in its founding and knowing how to communicate with the target audience was a crucial factor in its success. Mendelsohn (1973) states that communications are likely to have “have relatively high success potentials” when “careful consideration is given to delineating specific targets in terms of their demographics and psychological attributes, their life-style, value, and belief systems, and mass media habits” (p. 52). Broom (2009) describes the elements of successful communication that should be prevalent in every communications campaign:

The communicator must have *adequate information* . . . The communicator must be able to transmit information in codes the receiver can *comprehend*. The communicator must use a *channel* that will carry the message to the receiver. The message must be within the receiver’s *capacity to comprehend* and be *relevant* to the receiver’s interest or needs. Finally, the message must motivate the receiver’s self-interest and cause a *response* [Formatting in original] (p. 344).

Even after getting approval from the Alumni Association, it was still unclear as to whether ASU alumni would actually be interested in a club like this, so some preliminary research needed to be completed with the target audience. Broom (2009) says it best: “without research, practitioners are limited to asserting that they know the situation and can recommend a solution. With research and analysis, they can present and advocate proposals supported by evidence and theory” (p. 270). Without research, we could assume we knew what ASU alumni wanted in a club for nonprofit professionals, but it would not be based on anything except assumptions. With preliminary research of the target audience,

we can learn “who [the target audience is], what they know, how they feel about the [club], how they are involved or affected, what information they see as important, how they use it, and even how they get their information” (p. 227), and in knowing this, the club’s programs and communications could be truly informed by what the target audience wants (Bivins, 2011; Broom, 2009). To do this, a cross-sectional survey questionnaire was created and disseminated to find out the best ways to reach the target audience – alumni of Arizona State University who have a professional interest in the nonprofit sector through education, careers and vocations, and volunteering – and what they wanted out of this group, if anything.

## **Method**

A twenty-three-question online survey questionnaire was created using the tool SurveyMonkey (see Appendix 1 for survey questions). A combination of open and closed ended questions were created in two ways. First, the Alumni Association provided survey questions for special interest groups that they use when establishing new clubs and chapters. In order to uphold the Alumni Association’s branding and language and to stay consistent with other surveys they had previously administered, a number of questions were taken directly from this source, or slightly manipulated to enhance clarity and better serve the purpose of this specific questionnaire, including the types of activities the respondents would be interested in, the frequency and location of events, and the year of graduation from ASU. The remaining questions were adapted from the pertinent literature and what the experts in the nonprofit, alumni and alumni group, and communications field deemed most important to find out about in the target audience, including the level of

degree acquired from the university, other participation with the Alumni Association, types and frequency of communications, and demographic information (Bhattacharya, 1998; Bivins, 2011; Broom, 2009; Mendelsohn, 1973; Newman & Petrosko, 2011).

The questionnaire went through multiple revisions and then was given to a pilot group of three individuals who were members of the target audience. This helped test the face validity of the questionnaire to make sure the responses collected were the expected responses and the content validity to make sure that all of the important information was being asked. After the pretest, one final revision was made based on the responses from this three-person sample group and then the questionnaire was sent out to the sample.

## **Sample**

The sample for this survey questionnaire was purposive and nonrandom and was sent the self-administered questionnaire in two ways. First, the Alumni Association emailed the survey directly to all of the alumni in the Master's of Nonprofit Studies (MNpS) degree program, totaling 121 people. Individuals who have completed a professional degree in a nonprofit-specific education program, it can be assumed, will then have later professional interest in this sector and they were also guaranteed to be alumni of the university. The second means of collection was placing a community announcement in the Lodestar Center Nonprofit News (LCNN) (Figure 1). This placement was chosen because of the broad reach of this newsletter (over 8,000 subscribers at the time this announcement appeared), with the intent of reaching ASU alumni who were from other degree programs besides MNpS alumni. One limitation of this collection procedure is that not all of the subscribers are

alumni of ASU. The strategic wording of the announcement, as well as the wording within the survey questionnaire did seem to deter any non-ASU alumni from responding.

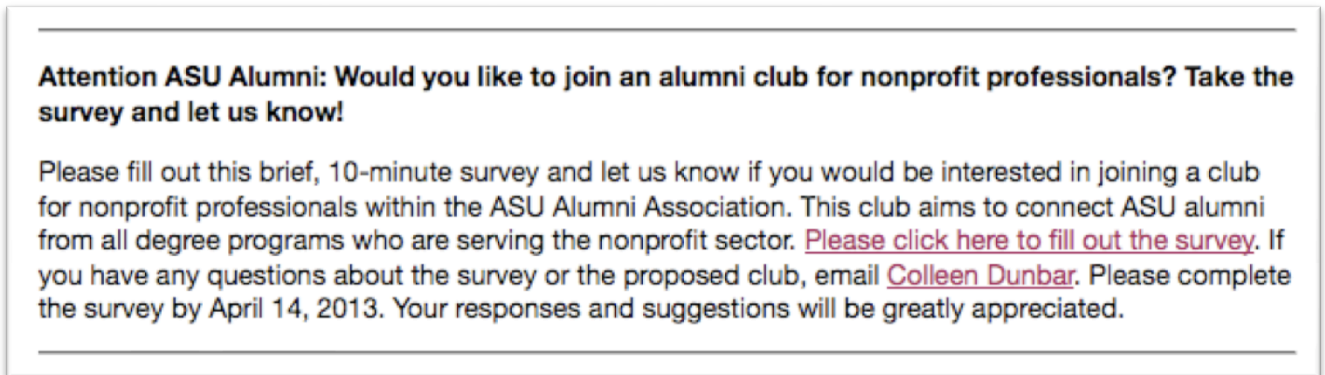
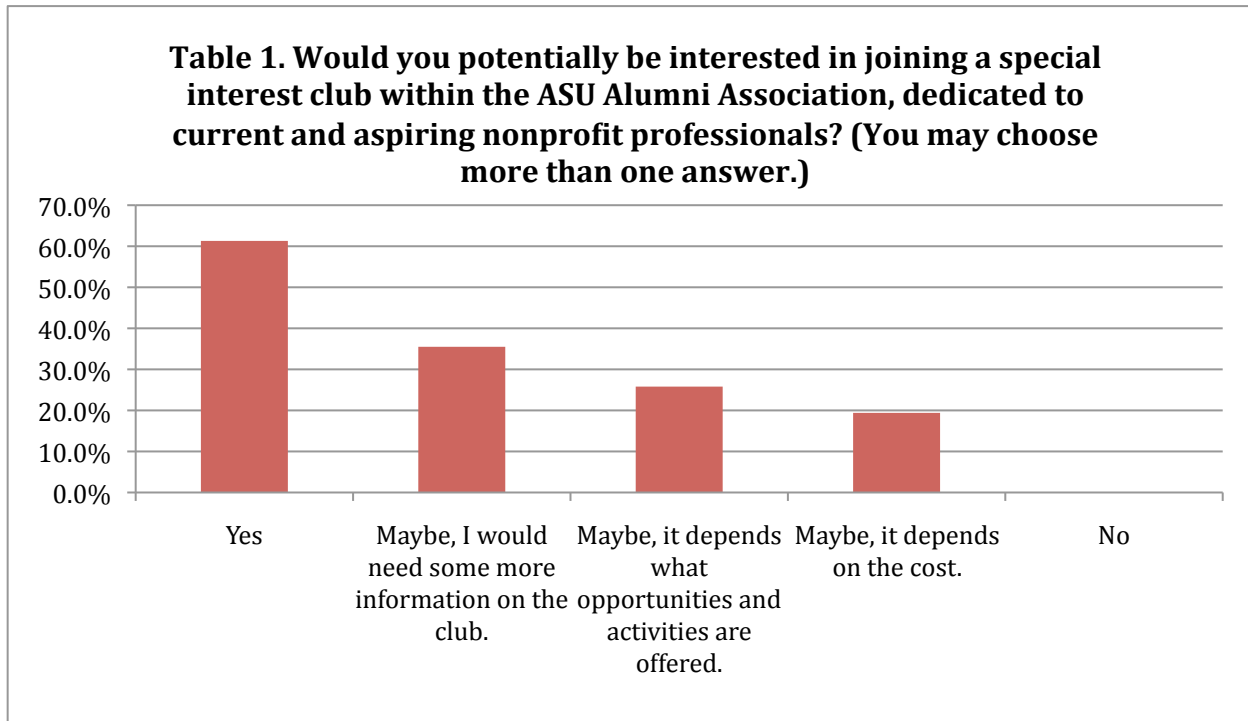


Figure 1: LCNN community announcement

## Results

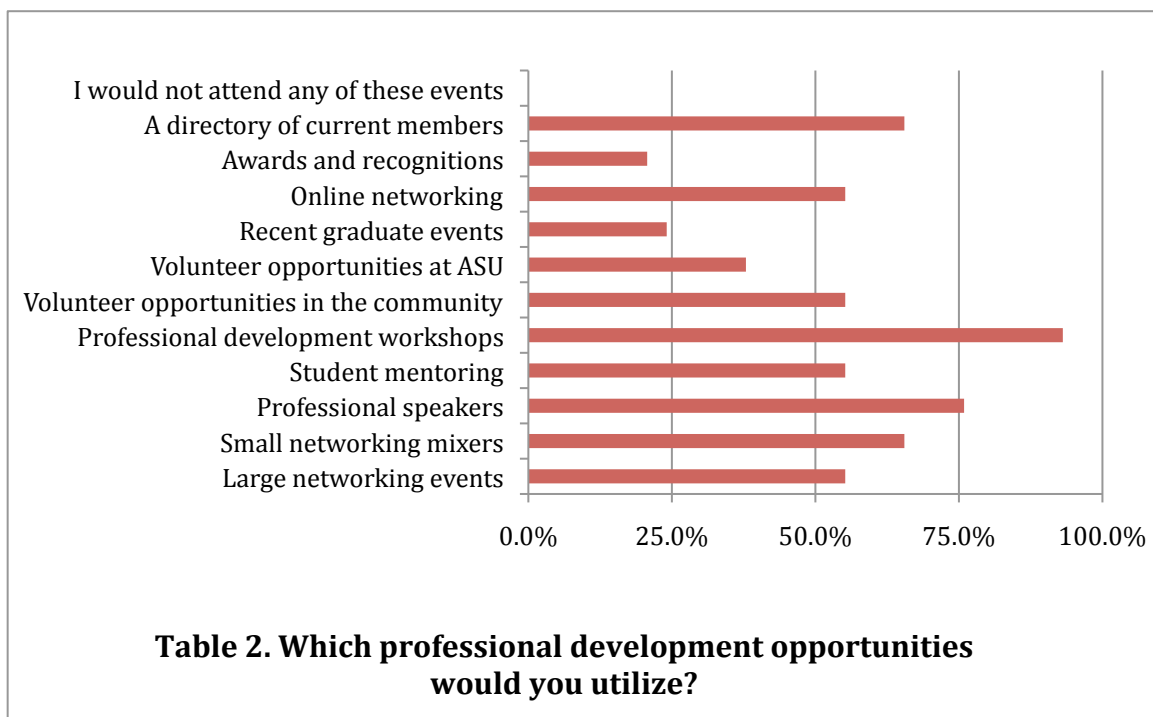
There were thirty-two responses to the survey, with thirty being 100% complete. The two incomplete responses were removed from the evaluation. Seventeen responses came from the Alumni Association's email to the MNpS alumni, resulting in a 14% response rate from this collection method and the remaining fifteen responses came from the LCNN community announcement. The majority of respondents were female (80%) and in the age range of 20-29 (43.33%). The ages selected ranged from 20-29 to 50-59. Most respondents live in the city of Phoenix (14), with others living in Chandler (3), Scottsdale (3), Gilbert (2), Tempe (2), Glendale (1), and Litchfield Park (1). Three respondents live outside of Arizona. Eighty-percent of respondents work full time, mostly in manager or specialist positions (65.5%) and the majority (83.33%) currently work at a nonprofit organization. All five of the respondents who were not currently at a nonprofit organization responded with interest in moving into this sector in the future. Graduation years ranged from 1982 to 2012, with the mode year being 2011 (7), the median year also being 2011, and the mean

graduation year being 2008. The majority of respondents (73.33%) indicated that a master's degree was their highest credential from ASU, with one respondent indicated reaching the doctoral level, and the remainder (7) at a bachelor's degree level.



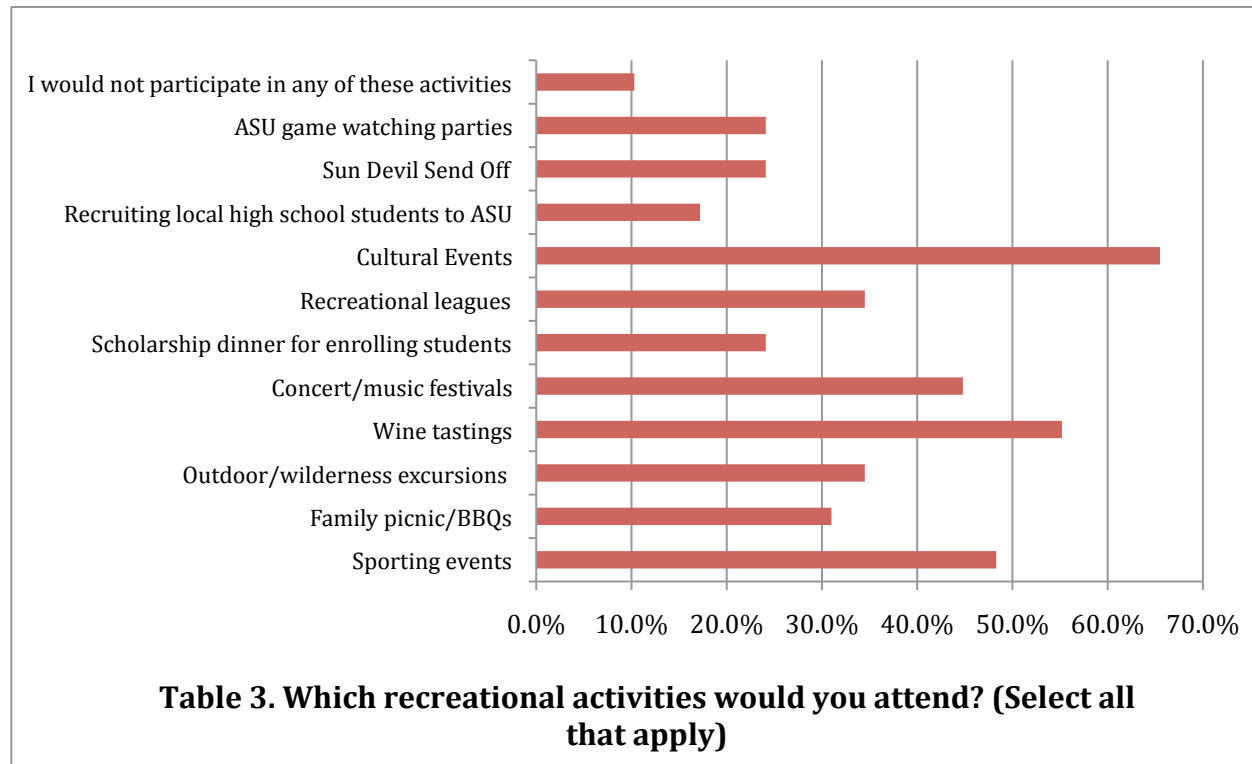
As shown in the above table, all thirty complete responses indicated interest in the club. Over sixty-three percent responded yes, they were interested in joining the club and the remainder indicated that they were potentially interested in the club, but would need more information, it would depend on which activities and opportunities would be provided, or it would depend on the cost. When asked what professional development opportunities respondents would like to see offered, the results mirrored the initial vision of this club, which was very promising (Table 2). Professional development workshops (93.33%), professional speakers (76.67%), small networking mixers (66.67%), and a member directory (66.67%) were the most popular choices, with large networking mixers,

student mentoring, community volunteer opportunities, and online networking coming in at 56.67% positive responses. Of the recreational activities (Table 4), cultural events/museum tours (66.67%), wine tasting (56.67%), and sporting events (50%) were the most popular responses, but three respondents (10%) indicated they were not interested in recreational activities at all, showing the professional development opportunities are of greater importance to the majority of these respondents.



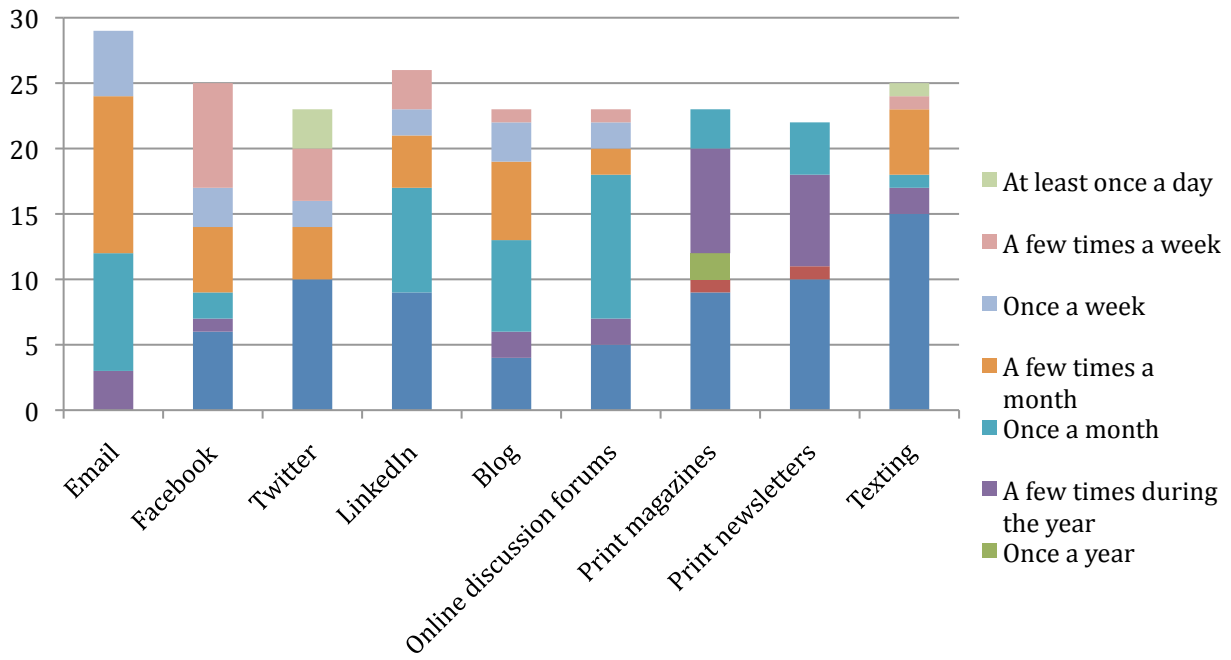
Most of the respondents (76.67%) indicated they would like some sort of club activity offered either monthly or every other month; and most (23 respondents) were available Thursday evenings, with the other weekdays (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday) ranging from twenty to twenty-two respondents. When asked about current involvement with other Alumni Association special interest groups, only one respondent was active in another chapter (Young Alumni). However, a question asking whether the respondent was

currently a dues paying member with the Alumni Association was not included and is a limitation of this survey questionnaire.



When asked about communications (Table 4) all thirty respondents indicated they would like some frequency of email, ranging from once a week to a few times a year. This shows that email should be the club's main form of communication. Social media was also very popular, with 66.66% of respondents indicating they would like to see the club active on Facebook, a blog, and an online discussion forum; and 60% indicating they would like to see the club active on LinkedIn.

**Table 4. Please indicate the types of communications you would like to receive from the nonprofit professionals club, for club announcements and event information, and how frequently you would like each type of communication.**



## Discussion

Overall, the survey results showed that the club has the potential to be very useful to ASU alumni. One survey respondent said, “I am VERY [formatting in original] interested in the possibility of this special interest club. I have not been able to find many organizations dedicated to nonprofit professionals in the valley, and I hope that the survey findings show that this club would fill a void for many,” which is just one example of the high interest level with the survey sample.



The results will also help provide the base of a strategic plan for the club. For example, the results of the desired activities section were very promising because it mirrored the initial vision of the club, of the focus being on professional development and community service, as well as what the literature deemed important, including small and large networking mixers. Seeing as though every respondent chose at least one – but usually multiple – professional development opportunities, but not necessarily recreational activities, it shows that this sample is interested in a more professional development-oriented club. That being said, in order to meet the desires of more respondents, some recreational activities should definitely be included in the club’s programming, but it seems that the focus should be staying on professional development. Respondents also showed interest in online and offline networking and the literature agrees that there are benefits to both: according to Brogan & Smith (2010), “the core of human interaction is still a one-on-one relationship” that can be enhanced through in-person communications (p. 196) and then the online groups extend “relationships in the spaces between face-to-face conversations” (p. 138) and this supplementation can have “positive effects on social capital” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 201). Online communities can also be “reached more quickly and leveraged more effectively than offline communities” (Brogan & Smith, 2010, p. 118). In contrast, Brogan and Smith (2010) state that off-line networking is beneficial because it can help “cement those relationships” that were built online (p. 125). The results of the survey also showed that for the time being, the club’s in-person events should be held in the Metro Phoenix area. Hopefully, if the club takes off and interest is shown in other geographical areas, satellite events may be a future possibility.

A major limitation of this survey was the sample. Based on the indicated age, graduation year, degree level, and employment status, the majority of the respondents were younger alumni and younger professionals, which will help inform initial communications and event planning strategies that can be focused on this demographic. However, since this was a nonrandom sample, it should not be assumed that this demographic will always be the majority. Another survey should be completed later on in the program to determine whether this demographic is still the majority and if more should be done to reach older alumni in order to diversify the group. The communications section of this survey was also informative, but again, if the survey results provide the base for a communications strategy, we run the risk of only reaching this same demographic and not diversifying the group. Because of the survey results, as well as available tools and ease of use, it seems that a focus will be put on online communications, however, the Alumni Association does offer some traditional media outlets, such as the quarterly print magazine, that will also be utilized in order to reach other members of the population.

Another limitation of this survey was the section on involvement with the Alumni Association. Only one respondent indicated being a member of another special interest group (Young Alumni), which could potentially either mean the respondents are not involved in the Alumni Association at all, or they are just not involved in specific groups. Unfortunately, a question asking whether the respondents are dues paying members of the Alumni Association was not asked, so a proper inference cannot actually be made on the respondent's involvement. However, since all of the respondents indicated a level of interest in the Nonprofit Professionals Club, hopefully they will be encouraged to be involved in our club whether they are active with the Alumni Association, or not.

## **Moving Forward**

In order to make this survey questionnaire not only informative, but practical, as well, survey respondents were given an option to provide their names and emails if they were interested in further information about the club. All thirty of the respondents who completed the entire survey opted to give their contact information and one respondent who dropped off gave a name and email address, as well. After the closing date of the survey, the respondents who gave their contact information were emailed and invited to an in-person, informational meeting, which became the second step in gauging the level of interest in this club and were also encouraged to pass on this invitation to others who may have been interested in the club.