Roundtable part 1: Best practices at retiree associations

Posted On 2018-07-09

The challenge of every retiree association is recruiting new members, keeping members in the fold, finding people to fill executive and committee positions, and finding a way to be noticed within the university community.

College and university retiree associations in Canada are quite varied: some are exclusively academic in their makeup, while others embrace both academic and support staff equally. At some institutions retirees are automatically members of the local association while at others membership is voluntary forcing the association to find ways to get retirees to “sign up.” Whether or not a local association is successful in registering new members is strongly affected by the willingness of university administrations to share information on new retirees, either by providing a list or other notice at retirement or by including association information in the pile of documents that retirees are to read in their final days of employment. One concern is that most institutions hide behind privacy legislation and use it as an excuse for not helping the retiree association in its efforts to connect with recent retirees.

The support of college and university administration was identified as an important to the long-term success of a local retiree association. Accordingly, it is important for the president and/or leading officers of the local organization to meet at least annually with an influential senior administrator. In this regard it is also important to find a way to have the university/college administration provide some real support to the local organization. For example, by paying for the cost of a retiree association telephone line (which can be monitored remotely by a member of the retiree executive), by hosting the retiree association’s website, by paying all or at least some of the CURAC/ARUCC annual membership and sharing the cost of sending a delegate to the CURAC/ARUCC annual conference.

Local retiree organizations can, for example, create visibility for themselves by launching an endowment fund in their own name to support a student bursary or scholarship, with the latter preferred because there are fewer privacy rules limiting student recognition. Further, the retiree association should consider funding a prize or award other than a bursary/scholarship. For example, at universities participating in the annual Three-Minute Thesis competition, the retiree association could consider funding one of the financial prizes, thereby generating visibility (and goodwill) among a wide spectrum of people within the university.

As to the recruitment of new people to offices within the retiree association, it was suggested that the existing members of the local board take a detailed look at the membership list to identify potential candidates and then assign someone to make a direct and personal appeal.

It was noted that universities are universally stingy with respect to post-retirement “perks,” and to the extent that they exist are not especially generous. One role of the local association is to find ways to protect these post-retirement benefits and, where possible, find ways to improve and expand them. This issue does give rise to the question: what kind of a post-retirement “perk” can a university or college reasonable extent to its retired employees?
