**AAHPERD: The Challenges Ahead**

**Background**

During fall 2011, I was invited to be a candidate for the 2012 AAHPERD President-elect position. In preparation, I decided to contact individuals who had served or were currently serving in the Alliance's national, district, or state associations. Almost 50 sometimes hour-long phone conversations followed, throughout which I took detailed notes. Intentionally, I initiated conversations with individuals who I anticipated would have differing opinions about the status of the Alliance and the best way to move forward. I discovered that despite some key differences there was substantial agreement about the urgent need for change. Without exception there was a common and clearly passionate concern about AAHPERD’s future.

Collectively, these phone interviews provided a perspective I decided was worth sharing. This essay is a compilation of what I learned from my conversations. No claim is made as to the objectivity. Nor do I plan to identify any of the interviewees. I've attempted to compile information in a meaningful order. I’ve tried to be accurate with any dates and data. Any errors are my own. Differing opinions, especially on important topics are identified and compared. I've tried to avoid inserting my own opinion but have sometimes added background information. At this critical crossroads in the future of AAHPERD, it's my hope that this essay will help inform and contribute to the discussion of the challenges ahead.

**The Urgency for Change and Previous Efforts**

While there's certainly no lack of desire about wanting the Alliance to have a successful future, it's clear that changes are urgently needed on many fronts. The organizational name “AAHPERD” is poorly understood and not only by the public. Members are confused by its complicated structure. Five national associations plus a Research Consortium, 6 district associations, and then 50+ state associations most of which share the same name but are in fact entirely independent organizations, are tough to explain and comprehend.

If current members were asked to design a new professional association, tomorrow’s Alliance would probably look very different. The late and highly respected management writer [Peter Drucker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Drucker) succinctly put it another way when he challenged business leaders to ask themselves what they would choose to look like if they hadn't inherited their existing structure.

For almost 20 years, AAHPERD leaders have deliberated organizational restructuring. The most current changes proposed by the Board of Governor's Organizational Planning Committee (OPC) were based on the recommendations of two committees created by recent AAHPERD Presidents Monica Mize and Vicki Worrell. Members of the Alliance’s Vision Committee I and Vision Committee II examined close to 20 committee reports going back several decades. Without exception, each of the previous committees recommended organizational and structural changes to the Alliance. The solutions proposed differed but were consistent in reporting organizational inefficiencies and urging immediate change.

Reluctance to change is understandable due to the uncertainty of outcomes. AAHPERD’s complex structure has resulted in many independently functioning entities, each of which has something to gain or lose if the Alliance changes. Unfortunately, while the Alliance deliberates structural change, members and nonmembers working in the professions it strives to represent are losing jobs. Unable to quickly respond to events impacting these professions, the Alliance is missing opportunities to establish partnerships and collaborate effectively with groups that share similar missions. In little more than a decade, numerous organizations have sprung up with goals that overlap those of the Alliance.

For example, the “Let's Move” campaign headed by the First Lady, created a unique opportunity not just for highlighting efforts to increase physical activity among children, but also for focusing public attention on the importance of school physical education. NASPE was quick to respond with its complementary “Let's Move in School” initiative, but its efforts were compromised when the initiative (spurred by what some have characterized as another well-intentioned but misguided Alliance Assembly vote), was adopted as an Alliance-wide program. As many have pointed out, AAHPERD is structured to provide leadership for products, programs, and services *through* its national associations. AAHPERD was not designed nor organized to lead or conduct its own independent programs outside of the national associations.

This compromised arrangement resulted in lost opportunities for NASPE specifically and the Alliance generally, to develop closer relationships with Let's Move proponents and to simultaneously highten public awareness of the need for increased support for public school physical education. Many other examples of lost opportunities for closer collaboration can be cited. Groups such as Action for Healthy Kids, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the ASCD, the NFL, the Presidents Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the After Schools Acceleration Project (ASAP) and others, have all created programs targeting school-aged children. None of these groups has an effective school-based delivery system for its programs. This opportunity is unique within the professions represented by the Alliance but to date this advantage has not been fully leveraged.

**A Refocused Mission**

The union of five national professional associations and a research entity explains the Alliance’s current wide sweeping professional mission statement. Although well intentioned, there’s broad agreement today that the Alliance can no longer continue to strive to be “all things, to all people” and in the future will need to become more focused to survive. Focusing on “what” and “to whom” is where opinions vary and debate intensifies.

A few critical facts are indisputable based on member data. First, approximately 85% of the current AAHPERD membership are affiliated with NASPE and identify themselves as teachers of physical education. Second, the vast majority of Alliance members work in some type of educational institution, mainly trying to meet the needs of children, teens, and young adults.

However, even though most Alliance members teach physical education, it’s also true that many members are responsible for teaching health, dance, various physical activities, and often coach sports. This recognition led representatives on both of the Alliance’s Vision Committees to urge consideration of the idea that physical education should be advocated (as others have suggested in the past) as an educational *process* rather than a class in school taught once or twice a week in the gymnasium. In other words, in becoming *physically educated* young people should experience all different types of physical activity including dance and sports as well as learning information that will enable them to develop healthy lifestyle habits. Moving forward this way, it’s been suggested that the work of all of the existing national associations could be integrated into one body that is primarily focused on children, teens, and young adults in educational settings.

Many AAHPERD members were perplexed by the Board of Governors’ decision this past year to urge Alliance voting delegates to approve unification prior to drafting and agreeing upon a new mission statement for the unified association. To them it made little sense to make structural changes to the Alliance prior to clarifying its mission. Critics pointed to the “structure follows function” adage. Almost certainly complicating resolution of the unified association’s new mission has been the urging by some members for the association to adopt a “physical activity” focus, and the insistence by others that “health” be part of any new mission statement. As many have pointed out, if the mission expands it will end up largely unchanged and add confusion rather than clarity to the work of the new association.

**Name Calling**

Contrary to other organizations whose name reflects what they do or who they are, the name “AAHPERD” reveals little about its purpose or members. As an alliance of differently named national associations each with its own mission, not surprisingly the public rarely sees AAHPERD as the “go to” organization for the professions it endeavors to represent. In today’s fast changing world, it's clear that AAHPERD struggles to exert leadership in the areas it purports to serve. In striving to represent a multiplicity of interests, AAHPERD is not recognized as the national authority in anything specific.

A historical perspective may be helpful. Today's Alliance began in 1885 as the Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (AAPE). The following year it became the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (AAAPE). In 1903 it transitioned into the American Physical Education Association (APEA), then in 1937 "health" was added and it renamed itself the American Association for Health and Physical Education (AAHPE).

Adding the word "recreation" a year later created the American Assocation for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER). In 1974 the addition of "dance" completed the AAHPERD acronym although in 1979 the word "Alliance" replaced "Association." A few years ago, a belief that the "AAHPERD" acronym needed updating spurred the Board of Governors to propose another name revision. This motion was defeated by Delegate Assembly members reportedly due to the absence of the words “Physical Education” in the new name proposal.

Much of the current discussion about an appropriate name for the proposed unified one-national association has revealed fears in some quarters about the potential for NASPE to “takeover” the Alliance. Not so widely recognized is that as the largest and most active of AAHPERD’s national associations, many NASPE leaders are equally nervous about unification and the potential of losing their identity. As the only national professional organization for physical education teachers, NASPE is already a widely recognized name brand. The possibility of being forced to rebrand under a different organizational name primarily to appease the reluctance of a minority of Alliance members to unify as a new “NASPE,” is disconcerting to many in Reston and certainly active NASPE members.

Vision Committee members intentionally avoided deliberating a new name for the Alliance. Aside from an unwillingness to devote precious discussion time to a very uncertain outcome, it was felt that this task demanded business skills beyond the expertise of the committee. Many of those I interviewed felt that renaming and rebranding were not questions best directed to members of the Alliance.

In recent years, two somewhat similar organizations to AAHPERD underwent name changes. In 2010, the YMCA sought to revitalize itself. It renamed itself as simply the “Y.” What began as a Bible study group founded in London in 1844 is now focused on youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Spurred on by circumstances similar to the Alliance, the Canadian equivalent to AAHPERD has now renamed itself “PHE Canada.” In striving for a “more visible and influential presence in the world” it changed its name and rebranded itself to be “nimble, effective, and relevant.”

Today, some members are fearful of a loss of identity should the new unified association simply be called “NASPE.” These fears are inspiring some to advocate for the inclusion of “Physical Activity” in any new association name. They suggest that physical education is one aspect of physical activity. But others point to the profusion of “physical activity” focused organizations. How would the new version of the Alliance distinguish itself nationally if it became one more among a plethora of national and state groups trying to promote physical activity?

But advocates for a “physical activity” focus in the new Alliance point to “physical activity” as fast becoming widely recognized as a major public health concern. “Physical education” they see as more of a liability for advancing the Alliance. In the context of growing fears about worsening obesity and its associated negative health consequences, physical activity promotion is attracting increased political interest and federal and foundation funding support. Ironically, this is occurring at the same time that physical education continues to struggle for public support, and programs and positions are being cut in many school districts nationwide.

**AAHPERD Board & President**

The current AAHPERD Board of Governors (BOG) consists of 15 individuals: Three Presidents (elect, current, past), 6 District representatives, 5 national association representatives, and a Research Consortium representative. Governance of the Board is primarily invested in its Executive Committee that consists of the three Presidents plus the Alliance’s Executive Director who serves as a non-voting member.

Revealed in my conversations, was a lack of trust that some members in leadership roles outside of the BOG have in the Board’s decisions and decision-making authority. The atmosphere and the antagonistic relationship these feelings have fostered have clearly impeded the ability of the Board to govern. Because BOG decisions have to be ratified by the Alliance Assembly annually at the spring national AAHPERD convention, it’s easy to understand the slow pace of organizational change.

The recent OPC report recommended Board restructuring. A recurring complaint by many Board members has been the frequently differing and unclear understanding that Board members have of their role. Because the members of districts or national associations elect them, some BOG members see themselves as representative *of* these groups. Consequently, they attempt to bring the perspective of this group to Board discussion and vote on what is best for *their* group. Frustrating to some BOG members has been a perception that some individuals clearly consult and sometimes share Board communications with others in the group that elected them before committing to BOG decision-making.

A contrasting view of what should be the role of Board members is that they should consider themselves representatives *from* (not of) whatever group elected them, but vote on what is best for the overall good of the Alliance. Because Board members are better informed than most outsiders, there’s a view that if the Alliance is to move forwards, BOG members need to be willing to take personal responsibility for making the best decisions in everyone’s interests.

Just prior to the Boston Convention, the Board discussed the OPC’s recommendations for restructuring. Through presentations and readings it was pointed out that a current trend in association governance is to reduce the size of governing boards. Also, rather than making it a priority to balance group or geographical representation, many organizations today are recruiting Board members to meet the organization’s needs. A comparable analogy using a sport example is to imagine the absurdity of trying to select a successful athletic team based on equal representation of the players’ geographical location rather than their ability.

A prevailing view is that in association governance as in sports, what’s primarily needed are specific skills and that where people live doesn’t much matter. In many instances, associations are now inviting Board members from outside professions who would bring some highly valued expertise. Coupled with this perspective is the need for Boards to recognize that their role is to provide leadership and advice, but *not* to get in the way. It is for the professionally paid staff of the organization to be given the support and resources they need to implement the Board’s vision. The Board is responsible for ensuring that work gets done but not for doing the work.

What is or should be the role of the Alliance President? According to one Past-President, the Alliance President has “little power but a lot of influence.” Through representing the Alliance publicly and at many professional meetings around the country, the President serves to connect the Board of Governors with the membership. Sometimes not understood, is that the Board of Governors typically only meets twice annually, so the President’s role most of the time is that of a communicator rather than a meeting administrator.

Past-Presidents report that it’s the President’s role to see the “big picture,” to try to create “win-win” situations, to move the association forward, and to avoid attempting to implement any personal agenda. In the OPC unification recommendations the idea was proposed to switch the election of the President from a vote of the Alliance Assembly at the convention to a member-wide postal or electronic vote. Advocates point both to the acceptance of membership-wide voting common in other associations, and also suggest it enfranchises the entire membership to elect its leader rather than a small group of selected delegates.

Supporters of sustaining the existing presidential-election voting procedures believe it beneficial to have candidates attend convention district caucuses and national association meetings to answer questions. They argue that delegates at the convention are better-informed member representatives. Seeing candidates in person and listening to their ideas and responses to questions allows voters to make more informed decisions than would be possible from simply reading prepared statements delivered online. The impact of the current presidential selection process on the willingness of individuals to be considered as presidential candidates has received little attention. It should perhaps be noted that these individuals are expected to be available to attend meetings for about 8-days of the convention week, face often repetitive questions from about a dozen different groups, and fund the entire experience themselves.

**Alliance Staff**

Largely ignored in the ongoing organizational debate among members has been the demoralizing impact the slow pace of decision-making has had on the Alliance’s Reston-based professional staff. Uncertainty about the Alliance’s future and their personal job security has impacted staff morale and contributed to staff turnover. Some Alliance staff members report feeling both undervalued and underpaid; feelings counterproductive to the needs of an organization that based on membership data is clearly in decline.

**Membership**

Too often overlooked in the debate over restructuring has been the ongoing and precipitous decline in Alliance membership. In 1951, the Alliance had more than 51,000 members. In spring 2012, the total Alliance membership was around 17,000. Just last year the Alliance lost approximately 11% or 1000 members. It should be appreciated that membership declines have been reported by most professional associations. But this decline although not unique to AAHPERD remains a worrying trend. With an estimated 300,000 individuals teaching health and physical education nationwide, there exists a huge potential member base. For professional associations, size matters because a group’s size impacts its revenue-generating potential through member purchases, advertising sponsorships, and the ability to influence public policy through lobbying and advocacy.

Why are so many individuals choosing *not* to become professional members? One belief is that in the prevailing atmosphere of Alliance turmoil there's a hesitancy to join or rejoin. Who wants to join an organization that appears to be in disarray? Certainly the economic downturn and its impact both on jobs and disposable income is another possible explanation. Some have suggested strategies for reduced membership fees while others point out that in comparison to many professional associations joining the Alliance is relatively inexpensive. Cost, they believe is not the problem.

It’s been suggested that the Alliance has lost sight of focusing on its members’ (and potential members’) needs. In all likelihood few of the Alliance’s existing 17,000 members care much about how the Alliance is structured or its name. And yet over the past few years, the BOG and the Delegate Assembly voters have been almost totally preoccupied deliberating issues related primarily to structure and function rather than significant professional issues or member needs.

Were resolving the decline in membership easy it would have already been accomplished. It hasn’t and in the eyes of many the decline cannot be allowed to continue without a more serious and concerted focus. If the Alliance is unable to establish itself as a professional association, and if professionals in the field continue to see the Alliance as irrelevant to meeting their needs, it clearly faces a precarious future.

**Finances**

The Alliance’s current budget is approximately $10 million. Revenue has been declining for several years and AAHPERD has been drawing on its reserves since about 2009. Four of the main revenue streams for AAHPERD are Memberships, Joint Projects, Grants and Investments, and Conventions. The decline in membership has already been noted.

With Joint Projects, in 2008 the Alliance lost 1/5 of its operating budget when the American Heart Association changed its formula for sharing revenue from Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart. The joint NASPE/AAPAR Head Start Body Start grant provided additional revenue for 4 years but expires shortly and the CDC grant to NASPE has been reduced. The Alliance’s investment revenue dropped during the nation’s economic decline. Only in the past couple of years has investment income shown improvement. The impact of the cancelled Boston convention on revenue is obvious, and Charlotte (site of the 2013 convention) is not recognized as a major convention location and unlikely to attract the attendance typical in other destination cities.

It is a testament to the visionary thinking and leadership of former and current Alliance leaders and staff that creating significant financial reserves was a focus during earlier and better economic times. Without this reserve fund, the Alliance would today be in perilous financial straits. Presently, the reserves of most of the national associations have fallen below targeted levels. The presence of the reserves has given the Alliance a small window of time to resolve its organization and to reestablish a sound financial footing.

One promise of unification is that it will reduce expenses most immediately through eliminating the duplication of efforts by five separate national associations many of which have for years been competing with one another for support from the same sources outside the Alliance. Also likely to be targeted for cost saving reductions are the Alliance’s approximately 118 awards, 17 magazines, and 10 journals.

Elimination of the “check” system through which a portion of membership dues is allocated to the budgets of the Alliance’s separate national associations might also have positive outcomes. For years, members joining the Alliance have had the opportunity to affiliate with two of the five national associations. Because most members work in physical education, NASPE is often the first selection and therefore receives the bulk of membership revenue. This means that the remaining four national associations are in effect competing for a member’s second affiliate choice. Members who might be interested in supporting more than two national associations only have two choices. Consequently, despite member interest, some national associations don’t qualify to receive membership income. Should the Alliance unify, competition between national associations for membership revenue would presumably no longer exist.

**Alliance Assembly**

One of the most interesting aspects of the relationship between the state professional associations (AHPERDs) and the Alliance is state participation in the Alliance Assembly. Representatives appointed by the state associations make up the majority of the Alliance Assembly, the primary decision-making body of AAHPERD. It is this Assembly that meets annually on the final day of the national convention to ratify Board of Governor decisions or propose and act upon alternatives.

Critics of the Assembly are puzzled at the extent of distrust many delegates display toward the Board of Governors. They point out that 6 of the BOG representative positions are after all both nominated and elected by the district associations. But perhaps of greater concern is the way in which the Assembly provides the independently operating state associations the power to dictate what the Alliance can and cannot do, an authority that history shows they have not been shy to demonstrate.

While true that each of the representatives is also required to be an Alliance member, the fact that they are nominated to serve by their state associations, concerns Assembly critics. The seating of delegates at the Assembly meeting, based on state affiliation, serves to reinforce a “state representation” rather than “member representation” mentality. Rather than being *member* representatives of the Alliance, critics argue that these individuals see themselves as state representatives and look to their state leaders for decision-making guidance when voting. Should the Assembly be preserved in the future, some has suggested that one improvement that might encourage “doing what’s best for the Alliance” would be to eliminate all seating assignments.

Advocates for maintaining the Alliance Assembly see its relationship with the Board as similar to Congress and the Executive Branch: An important system of checks and balances. Reflecting upon decisions made by the BOG in recent years, Assembly proponents believe it has served to prevent several ill-conceived BOG proposals. They suggest that most individuals appointed to the Assembly are well informed and knowledgeable on the issues to be discussed. This is a point of contention.

Critics point out that in many instances, delegates are appointed mostly because of their willingness to attend the Assembly on the last day of the Convention. Often they are very uninformed and tend to follow the advice of other state leaders. It’s suggested that in the past the delegate role provided informed representation otherwise unavailable from the general membership. Today however, rapidly changing technology has opened numerous communication channels with the entire membership. Conversely, an argument against decision-making based on member wide voting is the typical low voter participation.

Assembly critics point to what they consider have been several unwise decisions in recent years following motions created and passed on the floor of the Assembly without full consideration especially of the financial or organizational implications. For example, in 2011 following passionate presentations by a small number of Alliance members, the Assembly voted to overturn the Board proposal to restructure the NAGWS. In doing so it failed to consider the dire financial status of NAGWS and precluded the operational changes that NAGWS leaders had planned to implement. Rather than enabling the transition of NAGWS to a new supportive and workable structure, the Assembly vote in complete contrast to its intent, in effect handicapped the immediate way forward for the NAGWS.

One suggestion made by the OPC was to consider eliminating the Alliance Assembly and substituting in its place some type of member forum. This would provide members the opportunity to publicly express their views. It would not however be a decision-making group. Opposition to this proposed change is not surprisingly focused on the removal of a “check and balance” system of association governance. But advocates have pointed to the numerous (although still contentious) legal interpretations of the Alliance’s constitution that view the decision-making authority of the Alliance to belong solely to the Board of Governors.

Interpreted this way, the Alliance Assembly has no authority to reverse the Board’s decisions. Change advocates support quick compliance to this new decision-making relationship for reasons both legal and practical. They point out that requiring Alliance Assembly approval prevents AAHPERD from responding quickly to opportunities and events in a rapidly changing world. It slows down organizational functioning and hinders progress.

**Districts**

The impact of a unified national association and possible adjustments to the existing Alliance district structure is one of the most divisive points of contention. There is a palpable suspicion among some members that unification as proposed by AAHPERD’s Organization Planning Committee (OPC) would lead to the demise of district associations. Feelings of distrust have been amplified in recent years through the Alliance’s imposed restructuring of district financial record keeping. Although justified by Alliance leaders as a legal necessity, it nonetheless was perceived negatively and actively resisted by many district leaders.

Not surprisingly, perspectives about districts often vary depending on an individual’s past and current district connection and district size. Some districts have much more to lose than others. It’s no secret that among AAHPERD’s 6-district organizational structure there is a huge size disparity. Due to the population base, Eastern District and Southern District dominate in size and available resources. In contrast to the other four districts, Eastern and Southern have full time Executive Directors, numerous committees, and have the capacity to organize a myriad of programs for their members.

Those who have played active roles in these two districts attest to the positive professional impact the districts have had and continue to have on district members and more specifically on their own professional development. District activities they point out, have provided the stepping-stones for the emergence of generations of professional leaders. Districts they argue are also more attuned to responding to regional issues and have the local knowledge needed to effectively implement nationally developed programs.

It’s worth appreciating that some districts have longer histories than the Alliance’s national associations and began life as entirely separate, independent organizations. For example, beginning in 1912 as the Middle West Society of Physical Education and Hygiene, in 2012 the Midwest District celebrated its centennial anniversary. Significantly, its creation was reportedly motivated by concerns among Midwesterners about the dominance of people from east coast states in the American Physical Education Association (APEA) – the group later to become AAHPERD. Legendary national professional leaders such as Clark Hetherington, Thomas Wood, J. B. Nash, Jesse Feiring Williams and others emerged through initial involvement in this district.

Despite this historical legacy, others see the situation today differently. As part of the Alliance’s organizational structure, they believe that the primary purpose of districts should be to support, promote, and disseminate the products, programs, and services created by AAHPERD’s national associations. In practice, the extent to which this occurs varies widely in practice, sometimes due to financial limitations and sometimes due to choice. There appears disagreement as to the extent to which districts see themselves as arms of the Alliance or independent organizations. Of course in reality there is a symbiotic relationship. Districts do not have separate membership enrollment. Individuals automatically become members of districts as part of their Alliance membership.

Importantly then, the success of tomorrow’s Alliance is critical to the future of every AAHPERD district. The argument is made that the Alliance’s focus today must be on what is good for all members and that inequities need to be addressed. Today the disparate size of the 6 districts has created a “have’s” and “have-nots” situation. Eastern and Southern districts are financially strong and not surprisingly worry about the consequences on their organizations of changes to the Alliance’s organizational structure. Smaller districts, currently operating with limited budgets and part-time management, might stand to benefit from organizational change. Among the urgings of the OPC report was the recommendation that the Alliance reexamine district configuration.

Advocates for examining potential changes to districts emphasize the need to adapt to changing times. They argue that the local connections and communication advantages enjoyed by districts in the past can be met through today’s technological advances. They suggest that Alliance expenses can be significantly reduced through a more streamlined organizational structure. And they also point out that our profession is in many ways only as strong as its weakest link. News today is no longer local. It doesn’t matter where members’ programs and positions are cut around the nation.

When the Franklin Pierce School District in Washington State eliminated it’s middle school PE program and replaced it with physical activity offered by the Y, or when a Florida legislator proposed eliminating the state’s middle school PE mandate, PE proponents and critics heard about it regardless of where they lived. Today’s technology makes this type of information immediately available to everyone and potentially negatively affects all of us nationwide. Regional thinking they argue is out of touch with today’s world and the Alliance needs to adopt a more coordinated national approach to supporting the professions we choose to represent.

**State AHPERD Organization and the SAM Group**

As previously noted, few people (members and non-members) comprehend the relationship between state associations and the national AAHPERD. Currently, many individuals mistakenly believe that membership in one or other of these organizations provides a common membership. Certainly, naming similarities can partly explain this confusion. Most state organizations refer to themselves as state “Alliances of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.” But additionally, the professional activities embraced by state organizations are mostly based on the products, programs, and services developed by the national associations of AAHPERD. Only a small number of states, that similar to the two large AAHPERD districts have a higher population base, are able to fully fund leadership positions and conduct unique state-focused professional activities.

The independence of state AHPERDs does however create an obvious conflict: The Alliance and state AHPERDs both compete for the same members. Those individuals who do recognize the state-national distinction must choose between memberships or be willing to pay two separate membership fees. It is widely acknowledged today that today’s young professionals are growing increasingly reluctant to join groups and pay for benefits. Consequently, this dual membership conflict almost certainly undermines member recruitment efforts for both groups. Membership data reveals that a relatively small proportion of state members choose to simultaneously become AAHPERD members, yet the products, programs, and services they benefit from are primarily created at the national level albeit without their membership support.

Many state leaders would like to see a closer relationship with the national association and yet emphasize that state associations are vital and uniquely qualified to meet statewide needs. In contrast to Alliance districts, state associations have a distinct geographical connection with their members. One area of special concern to the Alliance and to every state is Joint Projects (Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart). Income generated through Joint Projects provides approximately 20% of the Alliance’s budget and an even higher proportion of annual revenue for many states.

Interestingly, public school teachers who are neither members of national nor state professional associations raise much of this revenue. It’s likely that in addition to helping to prevent heart disease, better coordination of promotional efforts between national and state associations for Joint Projects could likely significantly increase revenue. Conversely, if unification efforts fail to attend to sustaining AAHPERD’s relationship with the AHA in jointly promoting JRFH and HFH, both the national and state associations would quickly face a huge financial crisis.

Fears about excessive state influence on Alliance decisions are from some perspectives targeted at the Society for Association Managers (SAM) group. SAM members include the Executive Directors of each of the state and district AHPERDs. Those inside this group point to the many benefits enjoyed by state and district organizations through opportunities for SAM members to share information and expertise. Many state Executive Directors have years of experience and can provide a historical perspective that would otherwise be missing. Others fear the political power of the relatively small number of Alliance members within SAMs because of their ability to impact voting in the Alliance Assembly through controlling the selection of the majority of delegates.

Should the Alliance unify, many members hope it would lead to clearer communication, better collaboration, and an overall improved relationship with states. Closer coordination of advocacy to counter threats to cut members’ programs and positions, and the creation of a single fee joint memberships are two primary areas frequently cited as worth exploring. In contrast to districts, it would be up to each state to consider implementing similar structural reforms or remain unchanged.

Already, there are differences between states. A small number mimic the national structure and are named “alliances.” They maintain separate groups for health, physical education, recreation, and dance. Others call themselves “associations” and have one integrated structure responsible for all areas of professional interest. Perhaps significant, in view of the direction that national unification appears currently headed, at least one state, Wyoming, has renamed itself as “Wyoming Health & Physical Education.”

**Post Script**

This essay was completed prior to the recent July announcement that the 2012 Alliance Assembly voted to unify the five national associations and the Research Consortium into one as yet unnamed association. The additional recommendations of the Organizational Planning Committee (OPC) to the Alliance BOG remain to be addressed.

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