

AP, Education, and Member Aid

This group is a bit of a hodge-podge. At first glance the Achievement Program, the Education program, and the Member Aid program would seem to be separate items and, indeed, they are. However, they share a number of characteristics. First, unfortunately, all three seem to be poorly understood and unevenly implemented by regions and divisions. Second, on a positive note, all three are ways of reaching out and touching individual members and cementing them to the organization.

Let's begin with the AP program. Central to understanding it and using it is knowing that it is a national program that needs implementation locally. The NMRA website has a nice introduction to the program:

In simple terms, the Achievement Program (AP) is a travel guide, to help you on your journey through the world of model railroading. The AP also provides incentive to learn and master the many crafts and skills necessary in the hobby of model railroading. With the completion of each category, you will be issued a certificate acknowledging your achievement.

The AP requirements are a set of standards, but they can also serve as a set of guideposts for those who are new, near-new, and not-so-new to the hobby. Not because they lead to some sort of

official pat-on-the-back, but because they are a source of ideas for projects that can help us learn to become better modelers.

Briefly, the AP is a system of requirements for demonstrating a superior level of skill in various aspects of our hobby. It covers not only building various types of models, but also building other things which are important to the hobby, such as scenery, structures, track work, and wiring. It also recognizes service to the hobby and the NMRA, which are important as well.

So what is in it for us and how are we supposed to connect with it? What is in it for the region or division is resources. The people participating in it are excellent sources for clinics and other sorts of presentations. They need to build layouts for the rest of us to visit. They need to build the sorts of models that should fill our contests. They need to write and publish articles. They need to fill all the positions and serve on all the boards that we are having so much trouble filling. The program is structures so that a participant needs a fairly broad range of modeling and organizational interaction to gain his or her Master Model Railroader.

At a very minimum, we need to make sure that the AP coordinator slot is filled at all levels. If we are smart we fill it with a hot shot and let him or her loose.

We should make sure that our coordinator is in contact with the national coordinator. Our coordinator should be in cahoots with whoever is making up the agenda for our meetings and whoever produces our newsletter.

What is the down-side to all this? (There is always a down side. I keep in mind that automobiles were first hailed as the great solution to the pollution and flies that the horses made.) Actually, relatively little. The biggest hurdle seems to be the scoring for the Merit Award and how that does or does not affect our contests. I'm not going to rehash that here. If you look in the Contests section of this handbook there is a fuller discussion of the place of Merit Awards and how various regions and divisions handle them in relationship.

The other downside is getting someone to actually do the work of encouraging AP participation. Most other officers in a Division (or Region) are considered Committee Chairmen. The website says, "Basically, just about any office or function that isn't covered under Association Official" can be considered for Association Volunteer points. For example, if your Division has a person who runs the contest at the monthly meeting, they can be considered the "Contest Committee Manager", your local AP representative is a member of the "Region AP Committee", and so on." Maybe the solution is getting someone who is working on an MMR and needs Volunteer time to run the AP program. Does seem like a snake eating its own tail, but what the heck.

MEMBER AID suffers both from a lack of personnel to implement and a

lack of definition. The website states that it "is a benefit of your Membership which entitles you to ask questions related to the hobby. This program is a large benefit of your membership and provides a place for you to seek answers to questions about any detail on modeling in this fantastic hobby. IE: How to do what you want to do? What or how did a particular railroad accomplish their tasks? What color was a particular piece of railroad equipment or facility, etc?"

But it gives the member almost no way to access this benefit except "Contact your region President or Area Director and ask them to put you in touch with the chair." And suggests that the member seeking aid volunteer to help others.

That's too bad, because this is the sort of thing that many of those newbies, and we all have them, who join for a year or two and then drop out are looking for. Many of us who have been in the NMRA for a while understand that it is the brotherhood of model railroaders that we enjoy. The newbies don't know that. They know they want help. They know they need help. We help them and they become part of the brotherhood.

As opposed to the AP program, this is a program with almost no national direction. We can pretty much invent it to fit the needs of our individual regions and divisions.

Fred Bock, MMR the Director of Division 6 (South Texas) of the Lone Star Region is in about the same shape as the rest of us.

No, I do not have a "good handle" on the Member Aid guy. It's a greased watermelon that nobody in OUR region is carrying. But, if I could attach handles to it, here's how I would divvy it up into three pieces:

(1) Administrative Assistance: where to go to get admin problems taken care of, e.g. change of address, company store, membership status, where's my "Scale Rails"?, insurance, estate counseling, Pike Registration, and the like. This part of the job helps the Member with issues with Division, Region, National, and the various National Programs. (If there's no region "Members Aid guy", then this function probably falls under the region Membership Chair).

(2) Contacts: what clubs are around my area? Who has layouts that lets people visit? Who is using Digitrax? Where can I find a decent hobby shop? Is there anyone involved in hosting operating sessions? This part of the job involves having handy lists of names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and website URLs. (If there's no region "Members Aid guy", then this function probably falls under each Division Director's nose).

(3) Help: is there someone / some club / someplace where I can learn / get help / look at how to (long list of a variety of topics)? This part of the job is same as (2) above, but with knowledge of who knows what and is willing to help. A list of local MMRs, AP Certificate Holders, Golden Spike Award holders, Contest Judges, Contest Winners, and locally acknowledged "experts" (NMRA members or not) would be helpful. (If there's no "Members Aid guy", then this function probably falls under the region Education

chair, with assistance from the region AP, and/or Contest and/or Clinics Chairs).

Sort of an "ombudsman" (did I spell that right?) for the Region or Division. In a small population division like mine, the "member aid" function just gets rolled in with all the other functions of division director/super.

It's a start.

I think that is a good handle on what the job should do. Unfortunately, that is about all we have to offer. We have included a checklist of the sorts of information that a Member Aid chairman should have before launching into the job.

It would seem that all we need to do is structure the job as a member of some "committee" and then get the person doing it some credit towards the Association Volunteer AP certificate.

This is another job that should be in cahoots with the newsletter editor and the person who puts on the meetings. Not only does the chairman need to be visible and easy to approach, he/she needs people in all locals to be available to newbies.

Moving along to education, it is easily as nebulous as Member Aid. The education department nationally is mostly responsible for the AP and Gold Spike programs, but there is provision for an Educational Assistance Program. It is supposed to provide informative and educational material for those members who desire to learn more about modeling and prototype activities. It is supposed to provide a Clinic and Clinician

committee, who shall catalog, record and coordinate listings of clinics and clinicians, an Adult Education committee to an adult education syllabus, a Youth Education committee to develop a youth program, and a Video Clinic group to record live clinics and make them available.

This section has not been revised since 2000. I don't think I have seen any of these out of national in years, but they provide a good basis for a region or divisions education program. It clearly would be of a benefit to a region or division to maintain a list of reasonably local people willing and able to do clinics. Often this is reinvented every year by the person in charge of clinics for the local convention, basically culling the list from last year and adding a few folks that have done something new this year. If an "Education Chairman" kept such a list, it would make life easier for meeting and convention chairmen, especially if the chair went out looking for new clinics.

I must admit that the "adult education syllabus" eludes me. It sounds like a good idea, but I don't know what it means. How is it different on one hand from the AP program or on the other from the list of clinics, or, on yet a third hand, training for judges for contests?

There are a number of ways of implementing a Youth aspect to our education program. A couple of divisions of the PCR have strong Boy Scout Merit badge programs that sometimes are implemented at the regional convention and sometimes at meetings of their own. The national Junior College program at convention seems to have died out, but

bits of it could be rescued for regional conventions. In line with our discussion of Member Aid, all meetings and conventions should have some sort of newbie thread to them. It could be in the form of a clinic or even a Birds of a Feather group during some break. Youth can easily be folded into such a grouping.

Finally, recording clinics. The national guidelines are very specific about getting permission, but the technology is there and YouTube awaits.

As a last thing, Fred Bock has sent us an excellent PowerPoint on how to develop an education plan. It is very active and does not translate well to the static page. If you are interested, it is in the files section of the CD.

Checklist for Member Aid Person for Region or Division

(1) Administrative Assistance: This part of the job helps the Member with issues with Division, Region, National, and the various National Programs. Where to go to get admin problems taken care of, e.g.

- a. For following needs: Contact HQ@HQ.NMRA.ORG or send a letter for required information to headquarters; NMRA, 4121 Cromwell Road, Chattanooga, TN 37421-2119.
 - i. Change of address
 - ii. Membership status
 - iii. Missing my "Scale Rails" or orders from the NMRA Company Store.
 - iv. When seeking other NMRA modeler information, prepare a list of zip codes for the area where you will travel and contact HQ asking for a list of NMRA members living in those zip codes.
- b. Company store - http://www.nmra.org/nmrastore/supplies/Store_Index.html
- c. Insurance, NMRA Collection Insurance is J.A. Bash & Company, 300 Mt. Lebanon Blvd., Suite 225, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1509 Toll Free Phone: 1-800-654-2256.
- d. Estate counseling, MemAid recommends to an inquirer that we can only suggest the basics. IE: Prepare a list and value. This needs an attorney's input.
- e. Pike Registration, Pikereg@hq.nmra.org

(2) Contacts: This part of the job involves having handy lists of names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and website URLs.

- a. Division Meetings and contacts
 - i. Superintendent

- ii. Chief Clerk

- b. Regional
 - i. President

 - ii. Membership chair

 - iii. Website

 - iv. Newsletter

 - v. Convention

- c. Train Shows

- d. What clubs are around my area?

- e. What SIGs are active and how do I contact them?

- f. Who has layouts?

- g. Who lets people visit?

- h. Who is using Digitrax, Lenz, EZDCC, or NCE?

- i. Where can I find a decent hobby shop?

- j. Does anyone host operating sessions?

(3) Help: This part of the job is same as (2) above, but with knowledge of who knows what and is willing to help. Is there someone / some club / some place where I can learn / get help / look at how to (long list of a variety of topics)? List of:

- a. Local MMRs,
- b. AP Certificate Holders,
- c. Golden Spike Award holders,
- d. Contest Judges, Contest Winners
- e. Locally acknowledged "experts".

(4) Finally, recognize that the member may not know what you are supposed to answer and what is beyond your mandate. Be prepared to be asked about almost anything. Be cheerful. Be interested. And be honest when you do not know something.