

Board Brief

Designed for Club Board of Directors
June 2025

WHAT'S HOT:

Member Satisfaction... Then and Now

Member satisfaction in most private clubs has stabilized near pre-pandemic levels. Members, despite their many suggestions for improvement, consistently connect to emotional drivers like personal attention and recognition from senior staff and how receptive and supportive the club is of their primary interests. The question that keeps many club managers and their board members awake at night is: "What would cause someone to leave our club?"

In its 2024 *Club Members' Perspective Report*, GGA Partners identified nine factors that could cause members to leave their club soon:

Deterioration of club facilities is most important to 46 percent of the 3,750 individual club members who responded to the global survey. Members see the condition of the club as an indicator of the board's commitment to established standards.

Increased dues matter to 44 percent of survey respondents. Since the pandemic, members watch for indications that they are "getting their money's worth."

Decreased service levels diminish members' experience and can turn away 34 percent of respondents. Members emphasize their expectation—and value—for personal recognition.

Capital assessments to fund future capital spending concerns 32 percent of survey respondents. Club members prefer a well-articulated capital plan and a thorough use of all funding options and sources.

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Beyond the four most frequently identified factors, club members are mindful of reduced services (30 percent), decreases in their own ability to pay (27 percent), friends leaving the club (16 percent), and reduced opportunities for socialization (10 percent).

It is important to note that one-in-four (23 percent) of members believe that they are unlikely to leave the club. Club leaders most often hear from the 17 percent to 22 percent of members who are dissatisfied with their club; it helps to understand the counterbalance of club members who are committed to the club long term.

The *Club Members' Perspective Report* is part of GGA Partners' research initiative intended to understand what key stakeholders currently see and what the future holds for an increasingly complex and exciting area of the hospitality business. This research series explores unique views from within the private club, golf, resort, and residential community segments. 

Insights by Henry DeLozier, Partner, GGA Partners.



BY THE NUMBERS:

Capital Projects, Member Satisfaction, and New Members

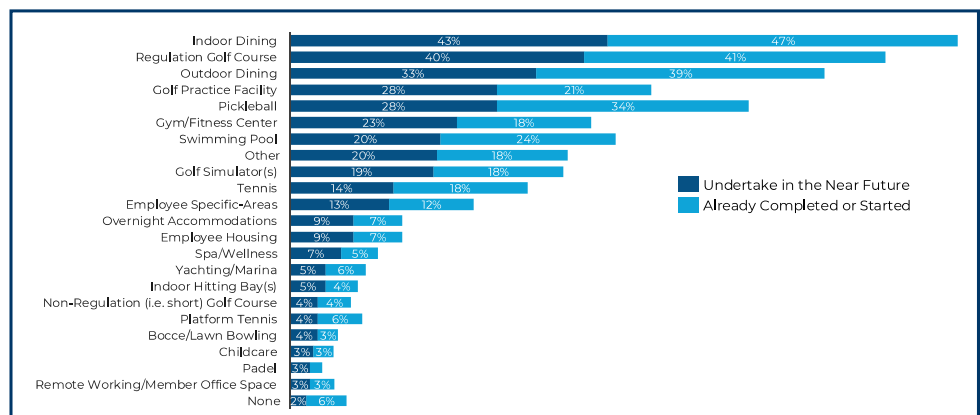
GGA Partners has again teamed up with the CMAA Research Committee to administer a research survey for members of the Association. The survey—*Club Leader's Perspective Report*—serves as a contemporary update on the pressing needs of CMAA managers and looks at emerging trends and challenges from the perspective of those in club management.

This report was initially designed to gauge the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on club operations and has evolved to review its ripple effects into the future. The research results will help club managers and their boards better prepare for the next normal. We'll continue to look at data regarding strategy in this edition of Board Brief—but you can find more data in the full report.

Enhancing the Member Experience

Capital projects are and will be dominated by member-facing amenities. While there is some interest in expanding tertiary amenities or activities, employee-specific areas represent a significant developmental interest and reflect the increased focus on creating a working environment that will attract and retain the best talent.

According to the survey results, dining, golf, and pickleball dominate the projects that clubs have already started/completed or will undertake soon.

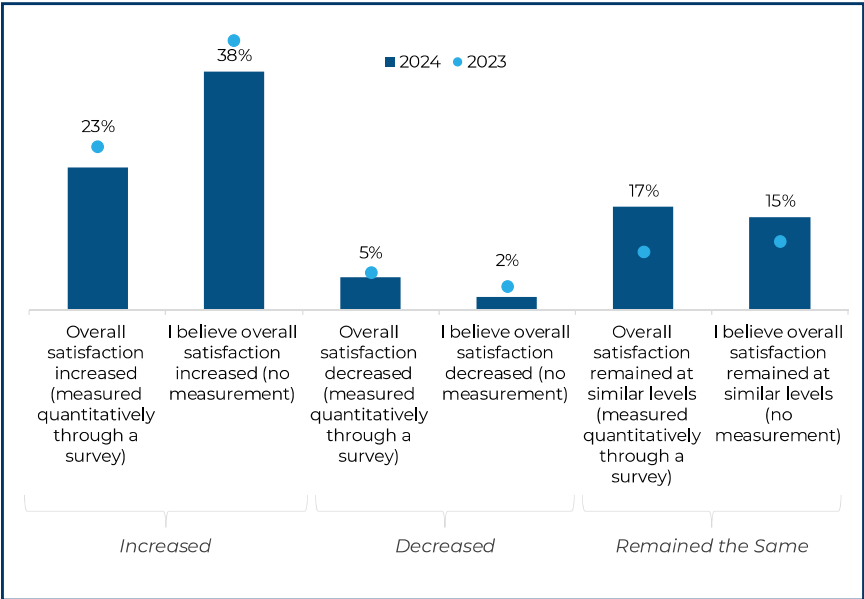


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Increases in Member Satisfaction Are Slowing


An increase in respondents indicates that satisfaction is the same as last year, while there is a decline in those who believe members’ satisfaction has increased.

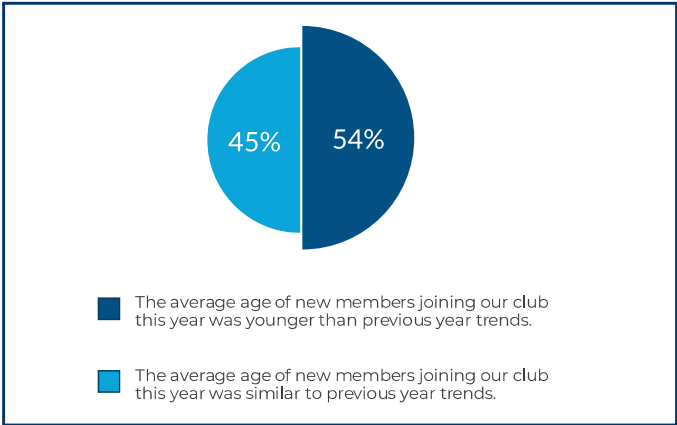
Regardless of whether club leaders measure satisfaction quantitatively, growth in member satisfaction is leveling off. Leaders who do not measure satisfaction perceive satisfaction at a higher level but see comparable rates of decreased satisfaction as those who measure it.



Members Are Getting Younger

Ninety-nine percent of club leaders surveyed indicate that new club members are either getting younger compared to last year or that they are similar in age to last year. More than half of respondents indicated that the average age of new members joining their clubs was younger than previous year trends alone.

CMAA members may access their complimentary copy of the full report from [GGA Partners](#). 





INSIGHTS:

What If We Thought Differently? *A Continuation*

In club leadership, we often operate in a reactionary cycle, responding to what's directly in front of us: a staff resignation, a last-minute member request, a change in vendor pricing, or a board directive. We get so used to solving what's urgent that we don't always make space to imagine what's possible.

Scenario planning offers a way to shift that. It's a strategic tool, yes, but more importantly, it's a mindset. It helps us ask: What could happen next and how might we prepare or respond with intention?

Unlike forecasting or goal setting, scenario planning doesn't assume one single outcome. It stretches your thinking into multiple paths, challenging assumptions and opening your organization to agility, innovation, and resilience.

Let's look at how you can use scenario planning in everyday operations, plus some questions to help you think through.

What if internships were designed to future-proof the industry?

Internships are often underutilized and treated as seasonal support instead of strategic pipeline development. But what if your internship program was your most important leadership incubator?!

What if...

- Interns rotated through all departments to build systems thinking. How might that shift their perspective?
- They partnered with staff on a capstone project tied to real club challenges, like improving member onboarding or creating staff training videos.

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- You designed mentorship models that genuinely inspired them to stay in the industry. What could that look like?

Clubs that take this approach don't just get short-term help, they get long-term ROI. They create brand ambassadors, potential future hires, and industry advocates.

I worked with a club that reimaged its internship program to include cross-departmental exposure and leadership visibility. What stood out most was the shift in mid-level managers. Mentoring gave their work new meaning, they saw their impact beyond a smooth-running dining room and took real pride in shaping future leaders. It brought a deeper sense of purpose to their roles.

For reflection...

- Are our internships producing future leaders or just seasonal labor?
- What would an intern program look like if leadership development was the primary goal?
- How could we structure internships to support our operations and talent pipeline?

What if we questioned our routines more often?

Operations tend to be shaped by precedent, what's always worked, what's seasonal, what's familiar. But scenario planning encourages proactive thinking.

What if...

- Weekday lunch dining drops 40 percent as remote work continues. Do we repurpose those spaces for coworking or wellness offerings?
- A regional vendor suddenly shutsters. Do we have local contingency partners ready?
- Our event formats lose popularity. How might we reimagine social engagement beyond banquets and buffets?

Scenario planning here doesn't require sweeping changes, just micro-strategy exercises embedded in department meetings. A simple "what if" question at the start of a weekly ops meeting can surface new solutions before problems arise.

For reflection...

- What standard practices are we continuing simply because they're habitual?
- Where could a small shift in operations create big gains in efficiency or experience?
- Do our teams feel empowered to explore better ways of doing things, or are they stuck in routine?

What if Burnout Wasn't a Badge of Honor?

This might be our toughest question yet but stay with me. For too long, we've operated under a grind culture: long hours, high emotional labor, and little margin for recovery. Now more than ever, well-being needs to be considered when we're planning for the future, without lowering the expectations for meaningful member engagement.

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What If...

- What if we piloted four-day workweeks or seasonal flex scheduling?
- What if we automated scheduling tools to reduce manager stress?
- What if retention bonuses were tied to wellness practices, not just hours worked?
- What if we rotated closing responsibilities?


This isn't just about employee satisfaction, it's about sustainability. The next generation of talent isn't interested in environments that sacrifice quality of life. Scenario planning gives you the tools to anticipate these shifts and build retention strategies that go deeper than pay.

For Reflection

- What systemic practices in our club contribute to burnout, and how could we rework them?
- What flexible models could improve retention without impacting service?
- Are we designing a workplace people want to stay in, or just one that fills shifts?

Final Thoughts

Scenario planning doesn't require a crystal ball. It simply asks you to lead with imagination, to step out of routine thinking, and explore possibilities with intention. It invites you to think not just about what's next, but about what else could be.

Start with one question at your next leadership meeting: "What if we thought differently?" You might be surprised by what opens up. 

Insights by Michelle Cocita, Director of Organizational Strategy & Client Success at Strategic Club Solutions



EXTERNAL INFLUENCES:


2025 National Golf Day: Wrapping Up the Largest Advocacy Event to Date

Annually, National Golf Day brings golf and club industry professionals to Capitol Hill to share the industry's contributions and advocate for the legislative and regulatory issues impacting the industry. It serves as the pinnacle advocacy event of the year for the American Golf Industry Coalition (formerly known as We Are Golf). The Coalition celebrated its 17th annual event on Thursday, May 1. The number of advocates who attended was **the largest in the event's history with more than 300 participants** conducting 240 meetings with members of Congress.

Volunteer advocates across the golf industry worked to educate Congress and their staff on critical issues including workforce and labor, environment, and health and wellness.

Three priority issues were addressed:

1. Advancing HR1583, the Parity for Athletic Recreation (PAR) Act, legislation to modernize the tax code and remove discriminatory language disqualifying golf and clubs from accessing various forms of disaster relief and economic stimulus programs available to other hospitality businesses.
2. Supporting HR2369/S1144, the PHIT Act, legislation that would allow the option to use pre-tax dollars through HSA/FSA funds for activity expenses including sports league fees, lessons & clinics, tournaments & greens fees, sport-exclusive footwear, etc.
3. Reauthorize the National Turfgrass Research Initiative in the Farm Bill and continue to fund \$3 million for vital research for the fourth largest crop in the US.

Advocates were also prepped on other topics of interest to the industry including the current discussions on Permanent Standard Time vs. Daylight Savings Time, the H-2B Visa Program, the reintroduction of legislation to provide a 40 percent tax credit on the purchase of zero-emission landscaping equipment, and the efforts to define the Waters of the United States. 

Second Edition of *Private Club Governance: A Handbook of Principles and Best Practices* Now Available

The National Club Association (NCA) and Club Management Association of America (CMAA) released the second edition of their landmark reference, *Private Club Governance: A Handbook of Principles and Best Practices*. The new edition adds a chapter on the implementation of outstanding governance for private clubs.

Originally released in 2023, the book was written by a joint committee of experts from the associations and designed to be a framework of best practices for clubs at any place on the spectrum of effective governance.

With the new chapter, clubs have a blueprint for improving their governance even further.


The new edition of landmark reference contains all the resources of the first in addition, and adds resources for implementation of outstanding governance. “With its new chapter, the second edition of the handbook is an even more invaluable tool for private clubs,” said joint Governance Committee Chair Tim Muessle, CCM, CCE, Chief Operating Officer, The Olympic Club, San Francisco, CA. “Its publication is the result of the work of top experts from private clubs across the US, and a continued partnership between both associations representing those clubs and their boards and professionals.”

CMAA members can access the Handbook in the [Best Practices Exchange Library](#).



Upcoming Governance & Leadership Symposium on July 30

Do you want to be better prepared for your role as a club leader? Attend CMAA’s next Governance & Leadership Symposium on July 30.

These one-day, virtual events are specifically designed to bring together the GM/CEO/COO and their club’s Board Members for collaborative education and leadership development. These Symposiums offer actionable insights and tools to strengthen club governance, and you will walk away with a deeper understanding of your role and valuable strategies to improve your leadership contributions. Presented in partnership with KOPPLIN KUEBLER & WALLACE, a CMAA Executive Partner, these highly rated sessions provide a unique opportunity to gain new perspectives and foster stronger partnerships between club management and elected leaders. 



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