

# Strategies for Local Branches

Compiled from brainstorming sessions at the

Branch Presidents Workshop  
New Orleans, LA  
June 19, 2011

Branch Leadership Workshop  
College Park, MD  
June 19, 2012

Three topics were discussed at length over the last two years:

1. How to Engage Local Officers in Branch Activities (pages 2-3)

2. How to Increase COA Membership at the Local Branch Level (pages 4-5)

3. How Local Branches Can Be Relevant in the Community (page 6)

Strategies for local branches to be successful in each of these endeavors are discussed on the following pages

(Note: some strategies may relate to multiple topics above)

# 1. How to Engage Local Officers in Branch Activities

## General Strategies to Encourage Local Branch Participation

- Have a conference line available for all meetings to accommodate members who are unable to attend in person or are in more remote locations
- Invite engaging or interesting guest speakers – do not have to be Corps officers – think outside the box!
- Invite COA-COF Executive Director – in person or by telephone, he is always a good draw
- Other COA Board members will be happy to speak as well
- If you feed your local officers, they will come – lure them with food
- Use a dedicated listserv, local branch website, newsletter, or other means to communicate regularly with local branch members

## Problem: A Few Officers Do All the Work

- Officers who volunteer for the local branch need to be recognized
  - In writing with a letter or certificate
  - In public (e.g. during a local branch meeting), acknowledge their contributions
  - Inform officers of recognition they will be provided for their service
- Use community service as a driver of participation
  - Create a structure wherein officers are expected to lead or co-lead community outreach events
  - Within this structure, future leads or co-leads are mentored and expected to lead the same or similar events in the future; provide continuity and leadership
  - Make sure the branch engages in many different types of events to attract varied interests of local officers, make sure to include many “hands-on” activities
  - Make sure these active officers are recognized appropriately
- Team up with other COA branches nearby; combine resources and work together on ideas for mutually beneficial events

## Problem: Having Trouble Bringing New Officers into the Fold

- Create a Welcoming Committee within the local branch
  - Packet of local info (e.g. where to get ID cards, medical, uniforms, local COA branch details)
  - Local branch assigns a mentor to each new officer
  - Welcome packet example available at: <http://www.coausphs.org/local-branches/branches-worldwide/>
- Query officers in your area (through COA Membership Directory) and send letters to officers not affiliated with your branch

Problem: Having Trouble Bringing New Officers into the Fold (continued)

- Give officers active with the local branch the explicit task of inviting new officers or not-so-active officers to branch meetings
- Offer to carpool with new officers; find ways to be in contact
- Make direct contact with new or inactive officers – face-to-face or by phone, not just e-mails or letters
- Establish a local mentoring program between active local branch members and new officers – provide recognition to effective mentors!
- Require that committee members within the branch must be active members of COA (both up-to-date on national dues and affiliated with the local branch) – verify this regularly through the COA Membership Directory
- Utilize the local Commissioned Corps liaison (and PAC or CPO as well?) to locate new officers to invite into the fold
- Use the local branch APFT to identify new officers and encourage their participation in branch activities

Problem: Having Trouble Engaging Both Junior and Senior Officers

- Know what kind of activities junior and senior officers prefer – survey to determine this if you don't know already
- Offer a variety of opportunities that appeal to both
- Increase community service and involvement
- Offer “kid-friendly” opportunities so officers can participate and bring their families along
- Start an internal local branch mentoring program – pair junior and senior officers
- Ask active senior officers to personally approach other senior officers in the area to engage them, encourage their participation
- Senior officers may be more interested in legislative issues, perhaps volunteering with the USO

## 2. How to Increase COA Membership at the Local Branch Level

Become familiar with the **COA Membership Directory** and check it often to see who is listed as an active member in your branch.

- **Only the branch president** has access to this database of COA members. Instructions on using this directory are located at: <http://www.coausphs.org/local-branches/branches-worldwide/>
- National COA categorizes members or former members by status (see below). You can reach out to individuals in each of these specific groups to renew their membership. This is one important way to increase your membership numbers.
  - “**PENDING**” are not paying the correct payroll deduction dues amount. After these members work with COA to complete paperwork to correct their dues payments, they will be listed as “**ACTIVE**”
  - “**SUSPENDED**” stopped paying dues recently.
  - “**INACTIVE**” stopped paying dues more than one year ago.
- The branch president can print out these lists of Pending, Suspended, or Inactive members and delegate other local branch officers to contact these individuals and ask them to return to COA.

Isn't there another way to get contact info for officers in the Area?

- COA has no access to DCCPR information about PHS officers. Aside from the information in the COA Membership Directory (which may be out of date), COA has no contact information for officers.
- **COA Local Branches are critical to identifying and reaching out to PHS officers who are not COA members.**
  - Work with your local Commissioned Corps liaison to find out about new calls to active duty.
  - Compare the officers you know or encounter regularly with actual COA members as listed in the Membership Directory.
  - If your local branch is geographically dispersed, assign different officers in different duty stations to identify and reach out to officers.

I've found officers who aren't COA members. How can I encourage them to join COA?

- COA has prepared a list of Talking Points on the Local Branch Resources page <http://www.coausphs.org/local-branches/branches-worldwide/> Print this out, share it widely, and feel free to come up with your own reasons to encourage officers to join COA.
- Your local branch by-laws require that participants in the local COA branch must be COA members at the national level. Politely remind non-members who participate in local branch activities to join COA or reinstate their membership.
- Many of the strategies to bring new officers into the fold would also work to encourage COA membership in general.

Often, officers stop paying COA dues inadvertently, because they lost the bill or neglected to update their address with COA.

- Many of these officers may still believe they are COA members. Approach them and explain that COA does not have them listed as active members. Then direct them to the link below to renew their membership or pay dues correctly.
- Encourage officers who pay by annual billing to convert to payroll deduction. This will make it less likely that an annual payment will be forgotten or lost.
- COA loses track of many members who do not update contact info. Encourage all officers to update their rank, contact info, local branch affiliation, etc. in their COA member profile.

**To join COA or renew your membership, begin here:**

<http://www.coausphs.org/membership/join-or-renew/>

# **3. How Local Branches Can Be Relevant in the Community**

Why should COA Local Branches strive to be relevant to their communities?

- Increases the visibility of the PHS Commissioned Corps
- Promotes camaraderie among local COA members
- Produce tangible benefits to the community

What are some typical community activities that COA Local Branches engage in?

- Booths at local health fairs
- Career fairs/outreach at colleges and universities
- Adopt a highway
- Fundraising for local food bank, other local causes
- Judging a science fair or math/science competitions
- High school career day
- Volunteering at Special Olympics
- Trash pick-up at parks, beaches, zoo, etc.
- Community run/walk assistance
- Use your imagination! The sky's the limit...

I have an idea for a community activity, but I'm not sure if it would be appropriate for our local branch. Who should I contact?

- If the activity is partisan or political in nature, forget about it
- Otherwise, first try to reach out to your local branch's liaison to the COA Board of Directors
- Next, if you can't reach that individual, try to contact any other leaders you may know on the COA Board of Directors
- Finally if the other options listed above fail, you can contact COA Membership Coordinator Malissa Spalding ([mspalding@coausphs.org](mailto:mspalding@coausphs.org)) with a cc to COA Executive Director Jim Currie ([jcurrie@coausphs.org](mailto:jcurrie@coausphs.org)) with your question

Keys to being a successful COA local branch:

1. Be relevant to your members
2. Be visible in the community