

RCMP Veterans' Association

2024 Membership Research Initiative

Interview between MP Mates Administrator, Murray Macham and Association President Sandra Conlin.

Murray: “Recently, a membership initiative was launched to attract new members to the Association which focusses on new members joining as part of doing research in what sounds like a focus group setting, could you describe this initiative?”

Sandra: “As you know, the Association has a long and important role for former employees of the RCMP, to help members transition from an active policing career to a second career or well-deserved retirement.

- The fundamental purpose for the Association is “veterans helping veterans and their families;”
- As with many other volunteer-based organizations, the Association membership has more people over 65 than under;
- New members are not joining at the same pace as we had in the ‘90s and early 2000s;
- Our initiative is seeking to entice new members to join as part of a resource group;
- They will be helping us learn more about the recent and soon to be RCMP Veteran; and
- With their help we can survey and get ideas and suggestions from them on how the Association needs to adapt to the discharging employees of today and the next 5-10 years.

Murray: “How is the Association going to recruit and create this group?”

Sandra: “About five (5) years ago, we asked the RCMP if they could assist the Association by amending Form 1733 to include a consent question that would permit the Force to share an employee’s contact information.

- The Force did amend Form 1733 and we periodically receive a list of those employees who have consented to learn more about the Association, throughout the year;
- In launching this initiative, we sent invitations to join the Association to over 1000 former employees;
- We also reviewed our list of former Association members and sent invitations to about 200 that had left in the past 3-5 years.
- Our next phase is to promote this initiative through our updated website (rcmpva.org) and social media platforms; and

- Reaching out to you and your MP Mates group is part of this next phase.”

Murray: “Say I am one of the possible new members, how would I go about getting more information or simply to join this research effort?”

Sandra: “Our objective for this group is to operate it totally in an online environment, e.g. there will be no meetings, committees or active volunteer events.

- The group will receive all the normal Association information and news by email;
- To join, an eligible discharged employee would go to the website and click on “join the Association;” and
- Now, the person would have two (2) choices:
 - o Join any of 28 divisions, OR
 - o Join the Research Group by selecting either the Yukon or Thunder Bay divisions.

Murray: “Why would a person interested in the research group join either the Yukon or Thunder Bay division?”

Sandra: “Both these divisions operate largely in an online environment due to the small number of members and the geographic area they service.

- They also do not add a Division Contribution amount to the annual membership fees; and
- A member joining either division would only pay the Association Dues amount of \$55.00, for 2024.”

Murray: “You mentioned that there are 28 other divisions which I assume all operate from a defined geographical city/town center. They would be providing services to those Association members in that area with monthly meetings and social events being a focus of the networking. Given the average age of the Association’s membership, is getting to meetings/events not an issue?”

Sandra: “Currently, we have 6 divisions that are province-based, e.g. four Atlantic provinces, Quebec, and Manitoba.

- The other 22 divisions are in the other four provinces – Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.
- A few years ago, an analysis showed that less than 10% of the Association’s membership lives within a reasonable distance from where a division would hold their primary meetings and events.
- With our society consumed by the online world, the traditional approach to networking through regular meetings and events has shifted to small coffee groups, websites, and social media platforms.

- Some of our valued members of the 20th century have struggled with using the “online environment.”
- However, the future members of the Association are “tech savvy” and as an Association, we need to quickly adapt to that environment.
- Thus, the reason for attracting members to be part of the research group, so they can help the Association adapt for the future.”

Murray: “Say, a possible new member sees the benefit of being able to provide some insight about what’s needed for future Association members, what, in fact, are the tangible benefits for being a member of the Association?”

Sandra: “The proverbial question! I was reminded of the results from the 2010 Regina AGM where the division Presidents and Board members were asked: “Why should someone join the Association?”

- The overwhelming number one reason was: “When a member passes away, he/she knows that their family will be supported and helped.”
- This reason, I believe, has not changed, and has amplified our mantra “veterans helping veterans and their families;”
- We do this through the Advocacy and Support program that has greatly expanded in the past 3-4 years;
- In fact, last year, the Association’s advocacy network helped over 700 veterans and over 350 regular members to access services and support.
- The Advocacy and Support network is made up of Association members – volunteers in most divisions;
- The difficulty with this type of benefit – the dedicated volunteer hours to help another in need – is that it is not easily quantifiable in terms of “return on investment of the annual membership fees;”
- A Veteran’s membership is about giving to those who need our help today knowing that in the future other Veteran members will be there to help us and our families when it is needed.
- I would prefer to describe it as an “insurance investment;” and
- Sometime in the not too distant future, a veteran and his/her family will need and benefit from other veterans helping them.

Of course, there are other more tangible benefits,

- Like becoming an active volunteer in a division – offering their talents and skills to the work of the Association; and
- We also have great sponsors that provide members with discounts on their products and services.”

Murray: “Do you believe that getting more new members will assure that the Association is meaningful and will continue into the future – it seems like there is the old guard resisting change and a group seeking to change for the better?”

Sandra: “We have come to accept that change is difficult in all our lives and organizations. Even though we know that “change is a constant/”

- No, just adding new members will not be enough, we need to:
 - o Become agile in seizing opportunities for the Association through better:
 - Research and representation on behalf of the membership with government and community stakeholders.
- ‘We are penny wise and pound foolish’ – it takes funds to properly run an organization:
 - o We need the membership to continue to invest their time and money in their Association; and
 - o While we also find ways to attract external funding to help us provide our network of services,because the Association stands for something important and worthwhile for our membership, for the larger RCMP Veterans’ community, and in Canadian society as a whole.

Murray: “We have been talking about attracting former/retired members to become an Active member which provides them with a voice and vote on Association matters. The Association is also open to and promoting currently serving members of the Force, as Associate Members, does this research initiative include involving Associate Members to add their views on where the Association has to adapt?”

Sandra: “Murray, that is an excellent point. Yes, we would welcome such Associate Members to join and to express their interest in being a member of the Research Group. To make that happen, the Associate Member will need to join a specific division and to clearly indicate that they wish to be a participant in the Research Group. As you know, Associate Members do not pay the Association Dues but may have to pay a Division fee – many Divisions do not charge an Associate fee but there are some that do. The application for an Associate Membership is through the division they wish to affiliate with; there is no online process for Associate memberships at this time.”

Murray: “Very interesting, Sandra. What can I and the MP Mates do to help with this initiative?”

Sandra: “I hope that our message and initiatives will get out and that interested former employees would seriously consider joining the Association.

- We need to hear constructive feedback.
- We need to emphasize that the RCMP Veterans’ Association is not the RCMP – ‘we are about “veterans helping veterans and their families!’
- The Association is a network of former employees of the RCMP, but our former employment is where we met in the past.

- Our future together outside of the Force, allows us to harness the network of people in the RCMP Veterans' community.
- That network can help individuals, groups, partners, and all those people who are the RCMP Veterans' community.
- We are stronger together and we invite all of those who make up the RCMP Veterans' community to come and see our Association as a welcoming, safe, and rewarding community, with a purpose to serve each member and their family.”