2025 Club Leaders' Perspectives

Building Bridges: Strategies for Connecting Members Across Generations

Private clubs face growing generational divides due to differing priorities. Older members often focus more on value for dues, while younger members seek modern amenities and new experiences. Clubs can create connections through social events and effective communication to bridge these gaps.

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Key Insights

- Leaders indicate that concerns over the value received from dues were of focus for older members, while younger members focused on club usage.

- When comparing generational differences, overall satisfaction was considered most similar between generations, while social interests were the most different.

- Regular social events, that bring members together, and effective communication are seen as the most successful ways to overcome generational differences.

Generational Challenges

The widening gap between generational expectations is a challenging landscape for private clubs. Each age group has its own priorities, presenting obstacles for a cohesive club experience. Economic factors play a significant role, as membership demand and fees often attract a wealthier or younger generation to many clubs. This shift results in diverse perspectives on what private clubs should offer, sparking a clash between cherished traditions and modern desires. The Club Leaders' Perspectives (CLP) research, conducted in collaboration with the Club Management Association of America (CMAA), delves into these issues and explores how leaders address them.

Understanding Club Expectations

Club leaders were asked to evaluate various statements regarding club experiences to determine whether they resonated more with younger members, were similar across generations, or resonated more with older members. As shown in Figure 1, significant differences exist between generations as perceived by club leaders. For older members, they were viewed as more active golfers and diners, with concerns about overall costs being notably more prevalent. Fifty-eight (58%) of respondents indicated this was a more significant concern for older members, compared to just 17% for younger members. While concerns about overall membership costs are an issue for private clubs at all ages[1], they are particularly pressing for older members. Results also indicate that younger members are more satisfied with the value they receive and are more engaged with non-golf and dining amenities and activities offered by clubs.

Figure 1. Generational Differences in the Club Experience
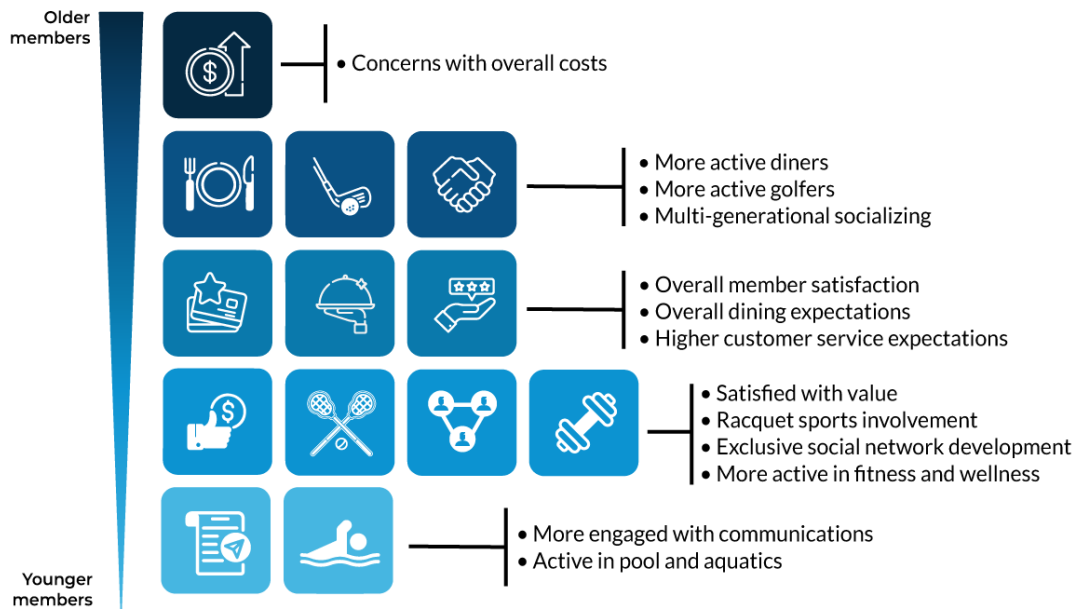
Note: Respondents were asked to identify whether club attributes are aligned with younger, older, or similar across generations. The further away an attribute appears from the middle, the more it skews towards a specific generation, with minimal perceived differences presented in the third row.

Differences and Similarities. This pressure from both segments underscores the need for innovative strategies to develop a more adaptable value proposition that can meet the needs of both segments. Clubs can start by identifying common ground among members to provide universal value. Respondents indicate that members of all ages share a common interest in socializing across generations (73% of respondents indicated a balance between generations) and share similar customer service expectations (56%).

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[1] *Club Members' Perspectives: Insights into the Changing Needs and Wants of Private Club Members* (West Palm Beach, FL: GGA Partners), 2024.

Clubs can also explore pay-per-use opportunities that may attract younger members willing to spend more while remaining mindful of those with different levels of economic tolerance. However, special emphasis must be placed on providing opportunities for cross-generational interaction, as younger members tend to form exclusive social networks that could limit intergenerational interaction.

Divergent Differences

Respondents were asked to determine the divergence between younger and older members to understand the range of differences. The results indicate that expectations can be divided into substantial, moderate, and minimal differences as detailed in Figure 2.

Substantial Differences. These areas indicate a substantial difference between generations. Considered gap-creators, these notable differences highlight the need for clubs to develop diverse strategies that cater to the interests of both groups. For instance, efforts to accommodate younger members include providing dynamic social events, adopting modern technology tools, and investing in new and modern amenities. In contrast, older members tend to favor traditional gatherings and communication methods while focusing on maintaining existing facilities.

Figure 2. Differences Between Generations
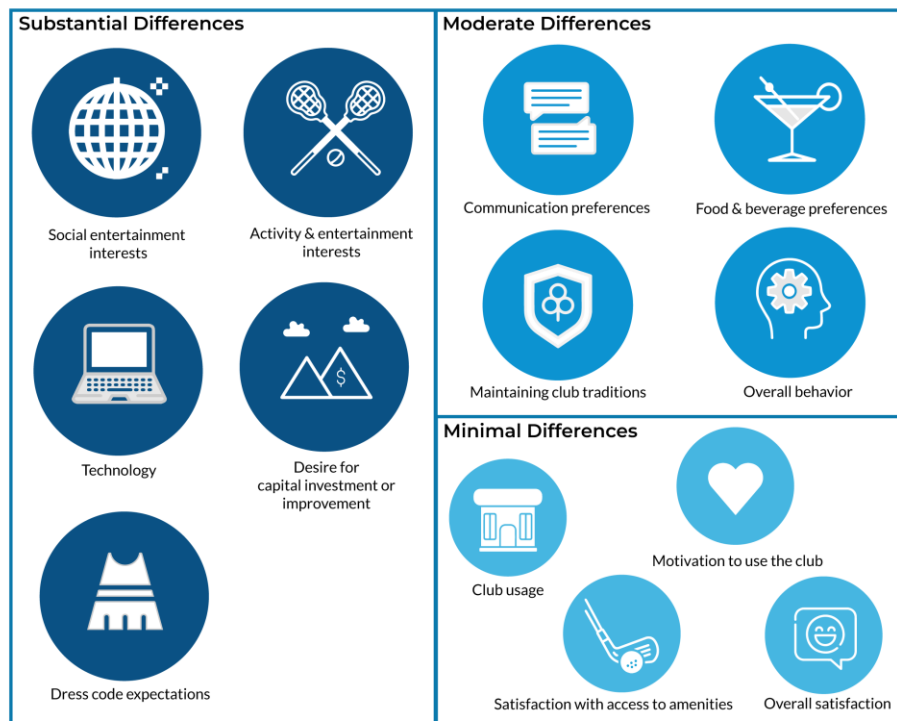
Note: Respondents were asked to rate the divergence between younger and older members on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 indicating minimal differences and 5 indicating substantial differences. Groupings were determined by placing similarly rated club experiences together based on the relative level of divergence between groups.

Moderate Differences. These areas indicate a moderate difference between generations as clubs may find targeted overlap regarding communication, food and beverage preferences, club traditions, and overall behavior. Identifying common ground (and differences) through member

surveys among these areas helps identify strategies and actions that effectively balance generational needs and preferences while enabling the club to tailor appropriate tactics.

Minimal Differences. These areas indicate greater alignment among age groups and can be considered relationship-building. Club usage, motivation to use the club, and access to amenities are opportunities to bring members together. Younger and older members generally agree on service standards, demonstrate comparable levels of engagement, and share similar motivations for participating in club activities. Despite specific generational differences, overall satisfaction remains relatively consistent, indicating that clubs are generally doing well to strike the correct balance in the overall member experience.

Bringing Members Together

Club leaders consider regular social events and effective communication essential for uniting generations. Of the 11 opportunities evaluated to enhance engagement shown in Figure 3, these two were identified as the most used and effective. Participation in social events is important, as it fosters member engagement, club relevance, and community-building. However, simply hosting events is not enough; clubs can strategically plan and promote their social activities with specific outcomes to encourage a balance of participation from each generation. In terms of communication effectiveness, a greater emphasis may be needed to educate and onboard the older generation, helping them to use and engage more effectively with modern club communications.

Figure 3. Frequency and Success of Generational Engagement Activities
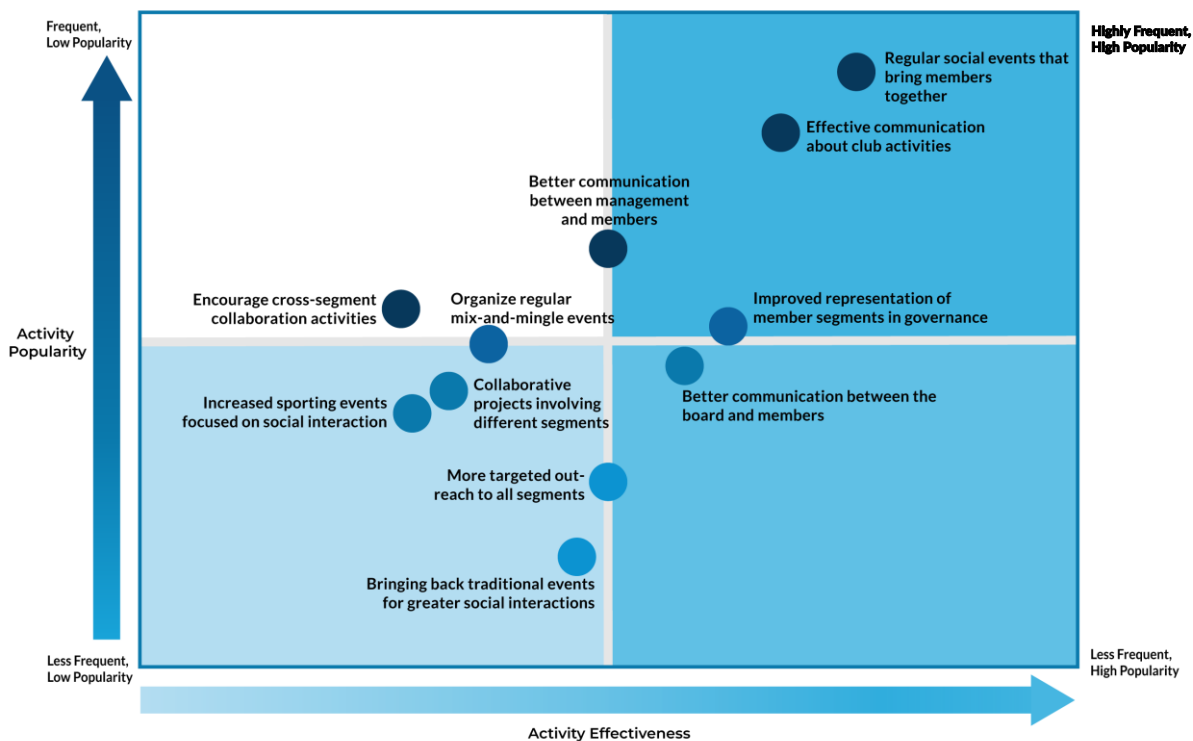
Note: Respondents were asked to select and rank the options that they considered most effective at bringing members together. Choices were placed into the figure based on their level of effectiveness and overall popularity at clubs.

In addition to prioritizing regular social gatherings and effective communication to unite members, improving the representation of member types/segments in club governance was also noted as an effective tactic. Specific engagement efforts, such as mix-and-mingle events and encouraging cross-segment collaboration, can further enhance community building.

> Improving the representation of member segments in club governance is seen as successful at bringing members together for many clubs.

Club Leaders Opportunity

Clubs have a unique opportunity to bridge generational divides through organized socialization. With 75% of club leaders agreeing that younger and older members desire to socialize across generations, the willingness to connect exists—it simply requires proactive facilitation. Clubs can also focus on targeted opportunities, including:

1. **Develop flexible membership options:** To meet the needs of multiple generations, clubs can introduce greater flexibility in membership costs through innovative models. Strategies include offering pay-per-use social events, creating senior transition categories with adjusted dues, and expanding ancillary revenue streams that allow members to pay only for what they use.

2. **Strategic development of a social calendar:** Develop and implement a thoughtfully designed social calendar to foster balanced participation in activities, supporting various generations and individual groups while bridging the generational divide.

3. **Facilitate modern communication adoption:** Identify the gaps and challenges in communication adoption for older members and consider allocating resources for better orientation and education to boost member engagement and adoption.

Successful clubs maintain a clear vision and mission that is understood and embraced by staff, current members, and prospective members alike. However, when attitudes and perceptions are divided, it becomes harder for leaders to move the club forward strategically. By actively fostering generational connections, club leaders can strengthen the sense of community and build a more unified culture that supports long-term success.

Visit www.ggapartners.com/insights to discover more about how effective strategy can bring generations together, explore insights from the Club Leaders' Perspectives research, and learn how GGA Partners can support your club's long-term success.