



## 2025 Club Board Perspectives

# Rethinking Membership Access: Board Strategies for the Future of Membership

As demand for club access continues to grow, boards are rethinking traditional membership limits in favor of more flexible, data-driven models. They are adopting a more sophisticated approach to re-evaluate their membership structures to better align with evolving demand and usage.

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### Key Insights

- The majority of respondents support a flexible membership model that allows boards to adjust levels based on usage and financial needs.
- Younger board members favor optimizing categories while older members lean toward reducing total membership to address capacity.
- Intermediate-age member categories are the main focus for access adjustments among board member respondents, with senior transition and social members following closely.

Before the pandemic, many clubs managed member capacity by the book—quite literally, bound by bylaws. However, surging usage in recent years has revealed a flaw in that logic. Boards are starting to ask: Should our member limits reflect what's written, or what's happening at the club? Is reducing member numbers the best solution, or are there more strategic options to improve access?

Our most recent research, the 2025 Club Board Perspectives Study, which surveyed board members from private clubs across North America and was conducted in partnership with the National Club Association, reveals compelling insights into how board members view capacity and

what can be done to manage it. Clubs that assess capacity based on actual member usage and expectations—not fixed rules—are more likely to perceive available room and realize benefits while exploring various management strategies.

## Understanding Perceived Access Satisfaction

Overall, 76% of respondents reported a perception that members are satisfied with their ability to access the club's amenities (Figure 1). However, a closer look at the data reveals key differences. Younger board members, those under the age of 50, expressed lower perceived satisfaction levels (3.6/5) compared to the overall average of 4.0. In comparison, older board members, those over the age of 70, emerged as the group indicating the highest perceived satisfaction (4.1). These perceptions align with GGA's industry research, which shows that the oldest members are generally the most satisfied group with primary amenity access<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 1: Membership Access Perceived Satisfaction**



Note: Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of member satisfaction in accessing amenities and facilities, with 1 indicating 'very dissatisfied' and 5 indicating 'very satisfied'.

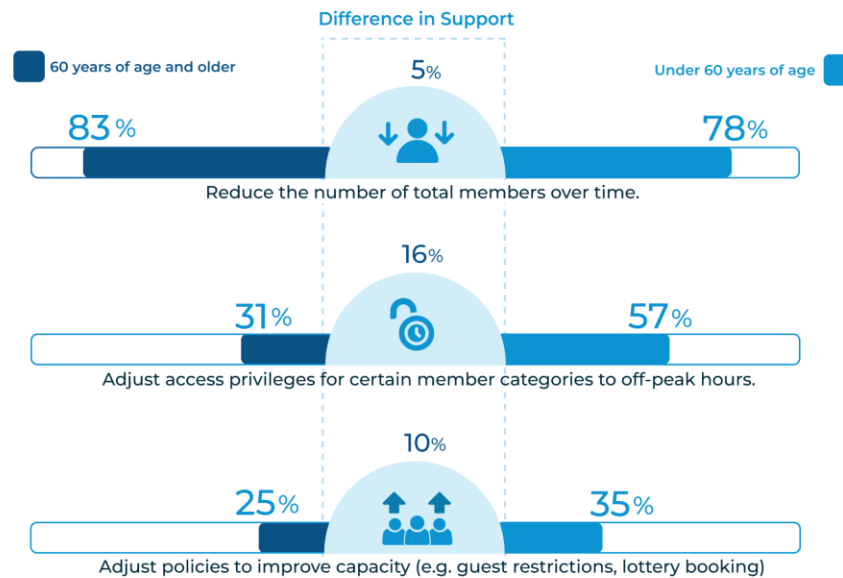
Interestingly, clubs with the highest annual revenue, with at least \$20 million, reported the lowest average satisfaction score (3.7/5). This suggests that even clubs with greater resources are not immune to access challenges. Unlike other areas of member experience, perceived satisfaction with access did not differ between male and female board member respondents. These findings reinforce the importance of taking a segmented, tactical approach to evaluating access satisfaction.

## Strategic Flexibility in Member Access

Support is growing for a more adaptive approach to managing member capacity, with 69% of survey respondents favoring a usage-based model over a more traditional, bylaw-defined membership limit. This result reflects a view that static thresholds no longer meet the dynamic needs of today's clubs. Instead, boards are looking to base their decisions on real-time data about how core amenities—such as golf, dining, and fitness—are being used.

Overall, a slight majority of respondents (57%) believe their current membership levels are appropriate given their club's utilization capacity. For respondents who expressed a sentiment of having too many members, board member generational differences in Figure 2 further illuminate how clubs might approach change.

<sup>1</sup> Our internal results show that over the past five years, members of the silent generation have generally been the most satisfied with access to golf as compared to other generations.

**Figure 2: Preferences for Member Adjustments**

Note: Respondents were asked to select the option they felt would be the most appropriate adjustment to improve member access. Since they could choose multiple options, the total exceeds 100%.

While both younger and older board members show strong support for reducing total membership over time (78% and 83%, respectively), they diverge significantly in their views on alternative strategies. Younger leaders are nearly twice as likely to support adjusting access privileges for certain categories to off-peak times (57% vs. 31%) and implementing policies that enhance access through operational changes (35% vs. 25%).

As boards consider future adjustments, the message is clear: static thresholds alone won't meet evolving member expectations. Instead, clubs can adopt a nuanced approach—grounded in usage data—that responds more effectively to demographic shifts and is flexible enough to accommodate membership adjustments as necessary.

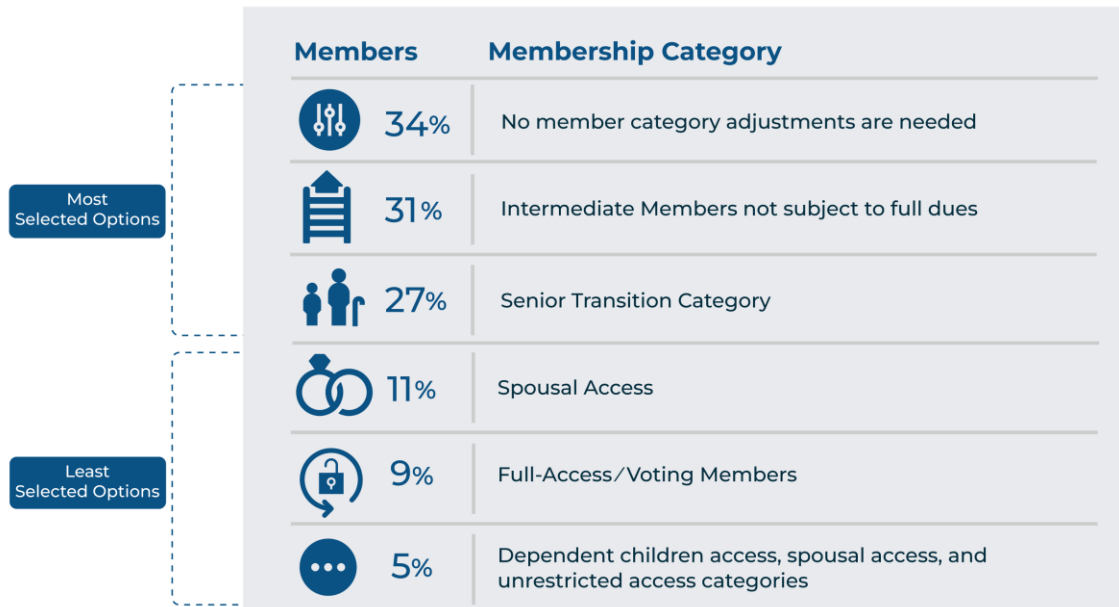
*Our deeper dive into the data reveals that governance matters to the member experience – best practice aligned clubs show better results when it comes to right sizing their clubs and using more contemporary methods to managing access.*

### Balancing Access and Long-Term Strategy

As boards face increasing pressure to manage access, attention is shifting toward adjustments in specific member categories. Intermediate members, classified as those younger than the transition

age to full voting status, were identified by 31% of respondents as the top category for potential adjustment. Close behind were Senior Transition (27%) and Restricted Access (25%) groups.

**Figure 3. Membership Category Adjustment Considerations**



Note: Respondents were asked to select which of the included categories should have their access privileges, pricing and usage levels reviewed and potentially adjusted. Results do not equal 100% as respondents could select multiple options.

While one-third of respondents did not believe adjustments were needed at their clubs, potential member divisions emerge from deeper analysis. Generational differences, which are an ongoing concern of club leaders<sup>2,3</sup>, preferences for potential adjustments show a similar divergent pattern. Younger board members, those below 50, show significantly more support for adjusting senior transition categories (41% compared to an average of 27%). Similarly, older members show the highest level of support for adjusting intermediate members (38% compared to 31%).

### Strategic Considerations

While adjusting access or pricing for Intermediate members could provide short-term financial benefits, such as increasing financial yield, clubs should exercise caution before constricting the pipeline of younger members. Boards that act too aggressively in restricting Intermediate access today may later regret having turned away their future full members.

### Club Leaders Opportunity

As demand for club access continues to evolve, club leaders must move beyond static membership models and toward more data-informed, usage-based strategies to balance competing priorities. To accomplish this, leaders can:

<sup>2</sup> Club Members' Perspectives: Insights into the Changing Needs and Wants of Private Club Members (West Palm Beach, FL: GGA Partners), 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Club Leaders' Perspectives: Finding Success and Facing Challenges 2024 (West Palm Beach, FL: GGA Partners), 2024.

1. **Track and Report on Key Usage Metrics:** Identify key data points, such as peak usage times, amenity-specific demand, waitlist trends, and member visitation frequency, that should be consistently tracked and reported to the board.
2. **Treat Convenient Access as an Amenity.** Regularly gather member feedback, such as through annual surveys, to evaluate member satisfaction with current access and understand how members might change their usage habits in the future.
3. **Enable Flexibility for Membership Adjustments:** Review your bylaws and governance policies to determine what changes are necessary to enable the board to adjust member levels or access privileges annually, based on usage patterns and financial needs.
4. **Identify Pressure Points and Underutilized Assets:** Pinpoint locations of capacity constraints and areas for improvement to create strategies such as off-peak programming, incentive pricing, or targeted promotions, to redistribute usage more effectively.

By embracing flexibility and adopting a segmented approach to membership planning, clubs can better balance access, satisfaction, and financial sustainability. The way forward isn't about finding a universal formula, but rather making the correct adjustments for your club, your members, and your future.

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