

diction·ar·y

SOCIETY of NORTH AMERICA

Connecting people who share an interest in **DICTIONARY MAKING, STUDY, COLLECTION, and USE**

The Dictionary Society of North America was formed in 1975 to bring together people interested in dictionary making, study, collection and use. As of 2022, the Society boasts a membership of 300 individuals in 25 countries. Members attend biennial meetings of the Society and receive biannual issues of *Dictionaries: Journal of the Dictionary Society of North America* and the *DSNA Newsletter*.

As the DSNA approaches its 50th anniversary, its Executive Board is engaged in strategic planning and a survey of the membership was conducted to inform that work. In March 2022, just over 280 current and former members were invited to answer 14 questions about the DSNA's publications, meetings, and member benefits, including what they value most about the Society.¹

A total of 75 people responded to the survey invitation, 73 members and two former members (a response rate of 27%).

The following report summarizes the findings, which confirm members are largely pleased with the Society's current services and publications and particularly enthusiastic for elements recently prioritized by the Society's officers and executive board through budgetary allocations: the journal and the biennial conference.

contents

who are DSNA members?	2
what do members value most about the DSNA?	2
what do members value about <i>Dictionaries</i> ?	4
what do members value about the DNSA Newsletter?	5
what do members value about DSNA conferences?	6

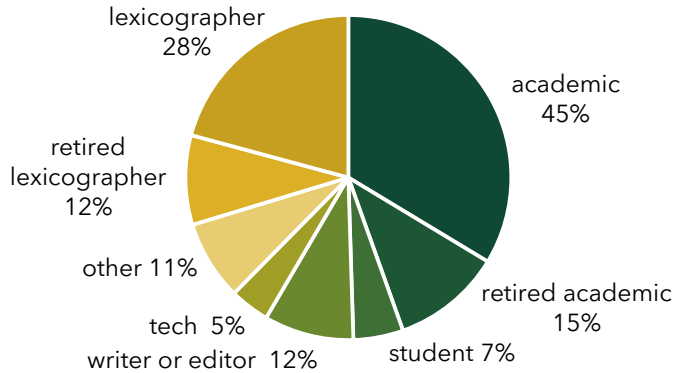
¹ Invitations were sent to 282 potential participants in the survey which was administered through SurveyMonkey 1 March 2022 to 22 March 2022.

who are DSNA members?

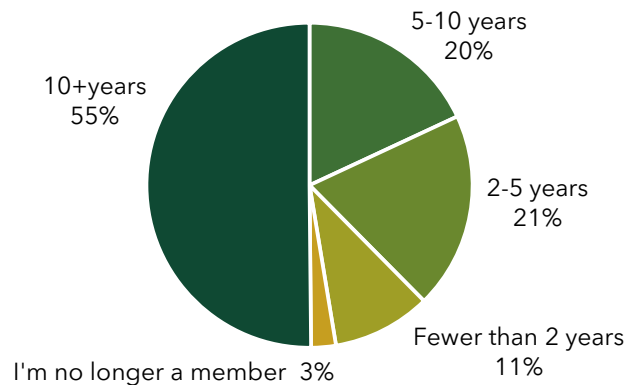
The majority of respondents reported being longtime members of the DSNA; 65% had been members for five or more years, 55% for ten years or more. Roughly a third of respondents reported having become members more recently; 20% had joined the DSNA in the last two-to-five years, 11% within the last two years.

Professionally, about 60% of respondents identified as academics or retired academics; 40% as lexicographers or retired lexicographers; 17% as writers, editors, or tech workers; 7% as students. Quite a few respondents (28%) indicated that they held multiple occupations, for example, 15% identified as lexicographer-academics, 4% as lexicographer-tech-sector types, 7% as writers who were also lexicographers or academics. Others (9%) specified occupations other than or in addition to those listed, including priest, publisher, lawyer, lab technician, and English teacher. Just over a quarter of the respondents (27%) identified as retired.

What is your current occupation?



How long have you been a member of the DSNA?



what do members value most about the DSNA?

In response to the open-ended question, “What do you value most about the Dictionary Society of North America?,” respondents indicated a wide array of member benefits, with particular enthusiasm for:

- connecting with others interested in dictionaries;
- learning about the best praxis of or latest research in lexicography;
- reading and publishing in *Dictionaries*; and
- engaging in the full range of DSNA publications and meetings.

The survey also asked respondents to rate how important it was that the DSNA provide 12 key member benefits, ranging from specific publications to more general forms of professionalization, support, and recognition. Averaged scores indicate that respondents found *Dictionaries* to be the most valuable benefit of the DSNA (78% of respondents described it as extremely or very valuable). Respondents also highly valued conferences, professional networking, and recognition of superior or new scholarship.

How important to you is it that the DSNA provides the following?



Less valuable to respondents were member-only forums, information about freelance lexicography opportunities, and financial support for conference travel. These received the lowest average scores; but it is nevertheless worth noting that more than a third of respondents (35%) indicated financial support for conferences was extremely or very useful, and more than a quarter (29%) indicated information about freelance lexicography opportunities was. Just below a quarter of respondents (24%) felt that members-only forums were extremely or very useful.

It is notable that, while financial support for conference travel (e.g., Presidential Memberships) was accorded a relatively lower aggregate value score, such support is intended for a specific segment of the membership: students. As might be expected, then, the majority of student respondents (60%) indicated that financial support for conference travel was very or extremely valuable.

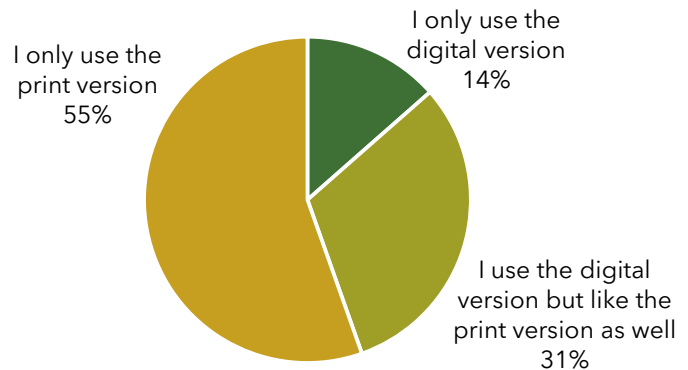
Responses signal that members recognize the work of the Society as important and that they value the publications and programs DSNA has long prioritized as a means of professional networking. Responses also signal one potential area for growth. While DSNA implicitly recognizes superior and new scholarship (insofar as *Dictionaries* regularly publishes high-quality original research and the DSNA has recently competitively awarded small projects grants to near-complete dictionaries or dictionary research), the Society might consider building in mechanisms for doing so more explicitly. Book awards are typical, for example, among the DSNA's fellow members in the ACLS.

what do members value about *Dictionaries*?

Given that respondents identified *Dictionaries* as the most valuable benefit of DSNA membership, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of respondents reported regularly reading it; 16% read each issue in its entirety, for example, while only one respondent indicated never read it.

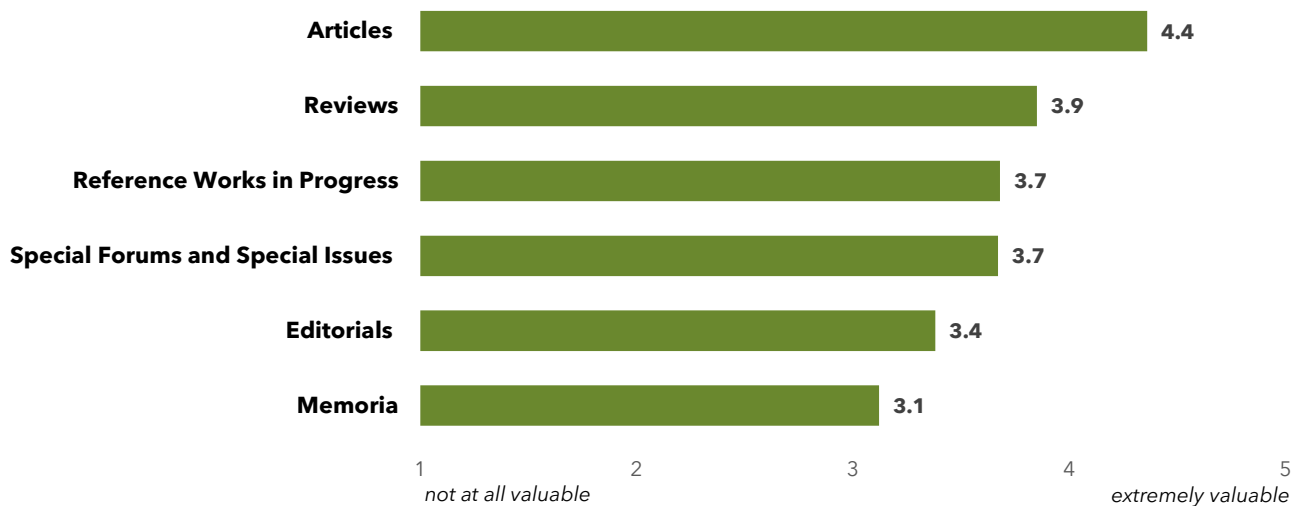
Readers indicated they appreciated both formats of the journal, print and digital (hosted by ProjectMUSE). A little over half of readers (55%) indicated they read only in print, 14% only online, but a third (33%) reported they mostly used the digital version but liked using the print version as well. The preference for print was more pronounced among respondents who also identified as retired.

How do you typically access *Dictionaries*?



Respondents were asked how valuable they found six particular elements or formats of the journal—articles, reference works in progress, reviews, editorials, remembrances, and special forums and special issues. Respondents found all six to have value.

How valuable to you are the following elements of the journal?



Articles were the most valued element of *Dictionaries*, though reviews, reference works in progress, and special forums and issues were also generally favored. 85% of readers indicated that they found articles extremely or very valuable; 70% of readers also indicated that they found reviews extremely or very valuable.

Editorials and remembrances received the lowest aggregate scores, but, here again, it is important to note that 45% described editorials as very to extremely valuable, and 30% characterized remembrances that way.

At present, all DSNA memberships are effectively print and electronic: An annual membership automatically includes two print issues of *Dictionaries* as well as ProjectMUSE access. Responses

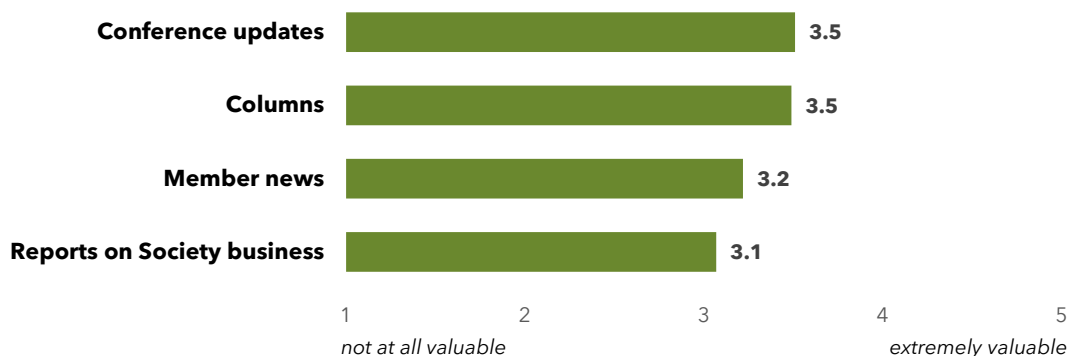
indicate that there may be some appetite for an electronic-only membership option. This is likely to have minimal impact on Society cashflow. An individual North American membership is currently \$60,²² and, in recent years, designing, printing, and shipping *Dictionaries* has typically cost the Society \$43 to \$50 dollars per year per member. This means that roughly three quarters of a member’s dues (72% to 83%) currently go toward journal production. Hence, even if electronic-only memberships were offered at a significant discount (e.g., \$30), the Society’s cashflow would likely remain stable.

what do members value about the DNSA Newsletter?

The majority of respondents also reported reading the newsletter. More than a third (40%) said they always read it and about a third (32%) read it often; only 7% reported never reading the newsletter.

Respondents were also asked how valuable they found four specific elements of the newsletter—columns, member news, conferences updates, and reports on society business. Respondents found value in all four, though enthusiasm for the newsletter was more temperate than for *Dictionaries*.

How valuable to you are the following elements of the DSNA Newsletter?



Respondents on average valued most conference updates and columns (e.g., lexicographer profiles, narrations of dictionary history, reflections on dictionaries and pedagogy). A little over half of respondents (55%) found columns very or extremely valuable, and the same amount (54%) indicated this for conference updates.

Member news and reports on society business received the lowest average scores. Just under a third of respondents (31%) found reports on society business very or extremely valuable, while 6% found them not at all valuable. About 38% of respondents found member news very or extremely valuable, while just 3% indicated member news was not at all valuable.

A twice-annual newsletter is guaranteed in the DSNA’s Code of Regulations, but the Newsletter is currently without stable leadership. A long-serving editor resigned in August 2021, and current issues are compiled and edited by an interim team led by the Society’s executive director. A new

²² Membership in the DSNA varies in type and cost. For individuals, there are eight forms of annual membership (North American, \$60; International, \$70; Student North American, free; Student International, free; Retired North American, \$50; Retired International, \$60; Joint North American, \$60; Joint International, \$70) and three forms of lifelong membership (Life North America, \$950; Life International, \$950; Fellow, free). For institutions, there are seven forms of annual subscription (North American Electronic, \$102; International Electronic, \$102; North American Print, \$131; International Print, \$153; North American Electronic + Print, \$151; International Electronic + Print, \$173).

editor or communications director has yet to be appointed. Whoever fills such a position might take into account a few findings highlighted by this report. First, members most value conference updates, which are more efficiently, prominently, and accurately communicated through the website, email blasts, and social media updates. Second, the presently minimal reporting of Society business and member news is apparently sufficient to reader appetite. And, third, columns have been wide-ranging in topic and style over the years, which may mean that readers are likewise open to wide-ranging topics and styles for future DSNA news.

what do members value about DSNA conferences?

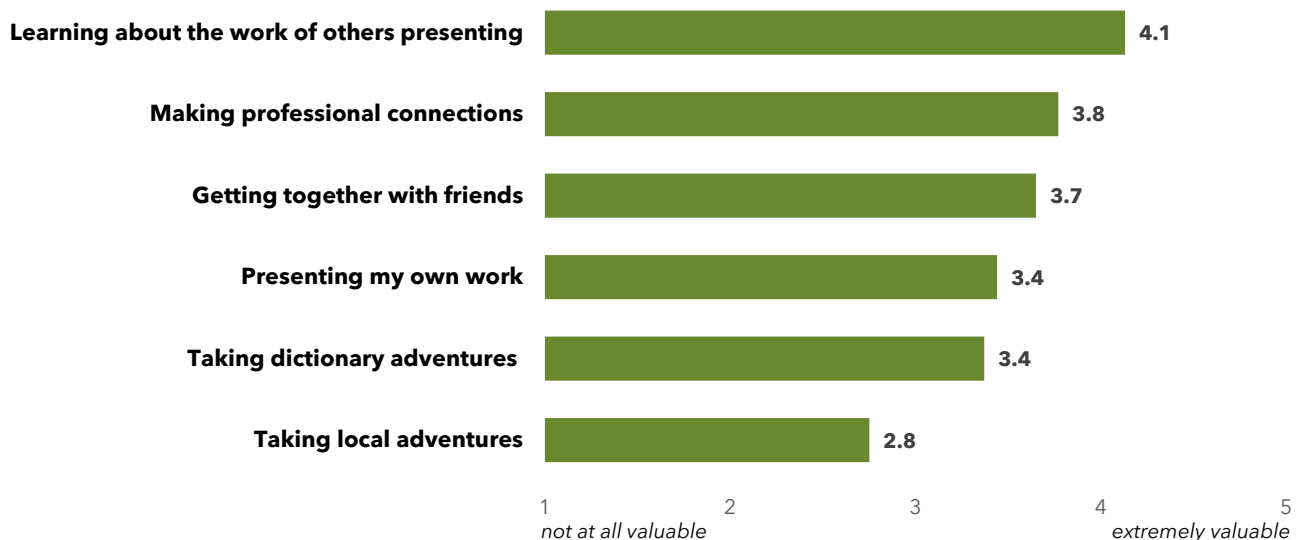
Members actively attend biennial meetings of the DSNA. The vast majority of survey respondents (71%) indicated they had attended at least one biennial conference; more than a quarter (27%) had attended five or more. The popularity of the conference held across all occupation types.

Respondents were asked how valuable they found six conference elements – getting together with friends, making professional connections, taking dictionary adventures (e.g., visiting the Cordell Collection at the Bloomington conference), taking local adventures (e.g., touring the island by bus at the Barbados conference), presenting work, and learning about the work of others in presentations. Members found value in all six, though their enthusiasm across categories was more varied than their enthusiasm across elements of the journal or newsletter.

Learning about the scholarship of others, making professional connections, and getting together with friends all received high average scores. For example, 73% of respondents found learning about the scholarship of others very or extremely valuable; 65% indicated the same for making professional connections, 57% for getting together with friends.

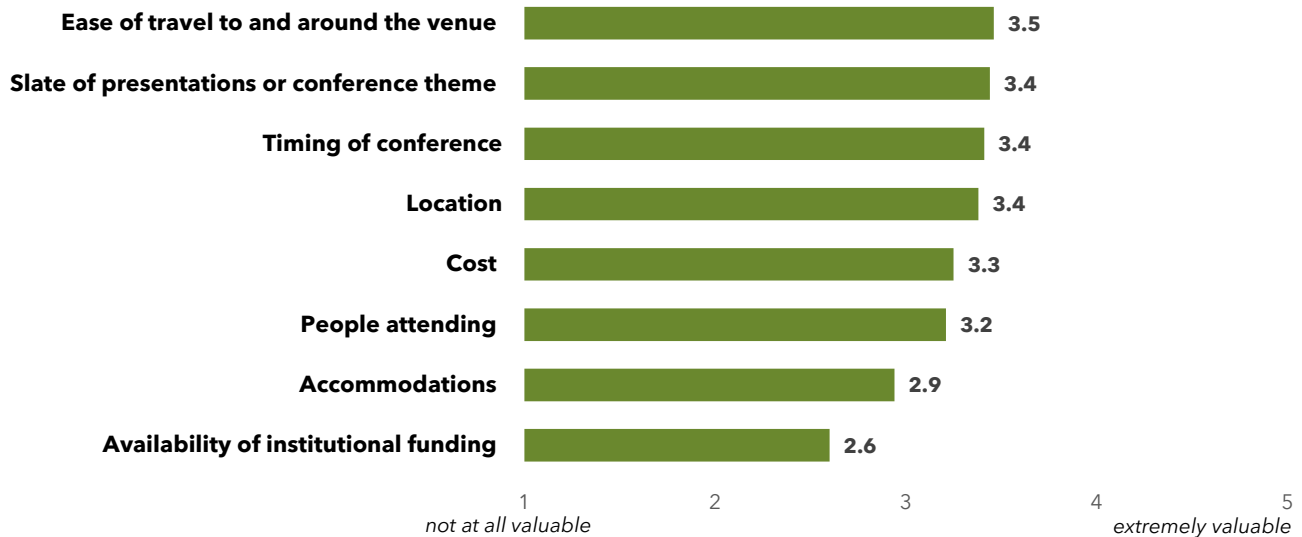
The lowest average rating went to taking local adventures, though respondents were split in their sentiments about these. Sixteen percent of respondents thought such trips were not at all valuable, while 29% found them very or extremely valuable.

How valuable to you are the following elements of the biennial conference?



Members' decisions to attend meetings of the DSNA are influenced by a number of factors including location, cost, and program. Asked about eight such factors, members indicated the slate of presentations or conference theme, ease of travel to and around the venue, timing of the conference (in early summer/late spring), and location most important.

How important are the following factors when deciding to attend a biennial conference?



Asked about future conference formats, respondents were open to both in-person and hybrid formats. About two-thirds (65%) indicated they would find a fully in-person conference very or extremely valuable, while a little more than half (54%) indicated the same for a hybrid conference, held in person with presentations streamed online.

Asked about smaller gatherings held in conference off-years, respondents were open to in-person, hybrid, and virtual formats. The highest average value ratings went to hybrid and virtual events. Nearly a third of respondents (30%) thought virtual events would be extremely valuable, while just under a quarter (22%) thought hybrid events would be extremely valuable. Only 15% of respondents thought an in-person gathering would be extremely valuable, and 11% thought an in-person gathering in off-years would be not at all valuable.

It is important to note that DSNA conferences are organized by individual members, sometimes with the support of their institutions. The elements of a biennial therefore vary from organizer to organizer, though presentations are the conference core and clearly valued by members. Elements less valued by respondents (e.g., trips to dictionary collections or local attractions) are often optional and may well have ranked higher among the subset of members who participate.

The Society has limited control over many of the factors that influence attendance decisions. Given that conference locations and logistics are proposed by individual members, location, ease of travel, accommodations, and even the slate of presenters or conference theme are determined by hosts. Cost and timing are influenced by this structure too: The biennial has historically been held in June because university campus facilities—for meeting as well as lodging—tend to be only available or available for more reasonable rates in summer. Fundraising from universities and publishers has also helped keep conference costs low, while occasionally meeting alongside Studies in the History of the English Language has made it possible to share labor and assure healthy attendance.

Conferences are not a revenue stream for the DSNA. They encourage and indeed require membership, but they only factor into the budget every other year and often end up costing rather than making money. (Indeed, biennial meetings would cost far more without the very generous contributions of time and labor by volunteer organizers, organizing committees, and officers.) Most other learned societies rely on conferences as a primary stream of revenue. As a result, many such societies are still struggling to recover from the financial losses of pandemic event cancellations. The DSNA proved nimble in offering an online biennial that actually generated a modest income.

Despite the success of the virtual 2021 biennial, respondents indicate a strong preference for meetings to be held, in part or whole, in person. And, at the moment, the appetite for smaller off-year virtual or hybrid gatherings is also modest.