

## Affiliate Liaison Report

Fall 2014

An online survey was run using a free application, Survey Planet. The questions from our previous survey (strengths, weaknesses, AIS improvement) were repeated, along with questions about affiliates knowledge of the AIS electronic media presence and use of AIS tools.

The online survey produced mixed results.

### **Survey Results**

The first two questions are regional and club identifiers. We didn't get an overwhelming response, but we did get wide representation. There were 130 responses from 14 different regions and 70 different affiliates.

There were also several responses from people who belong to no club, or report that there is no club near them.

#### **Question 3**

What is the biggest challenge your club faces?

Membership, membership, membership! Recruiting, retaining, and active participation of members.

A distant second was motivation of existing members, and third was finances.

Comments:

How do we get people to volunteer, become directors, deal with bad behavior, where to look for programs etc. That will be fun and informative.

#### **Question 4**

What is the greatest strength of your club?

A dedicated, knowledgeable, friendly core membership.

Also mentioned by several responders were their online formats, good communications plans and public events.

#### **Question 5**

Have you visited the AIS website or social media presence?

Overall Rating: Occasionally

Total Answered: 125

Iris		
Encyclopedia (Iris Wiki)	88%	110
AIS Facebook Page	33%	41
AIS Blog	29%	36
Other	12%	15

### Question 6

How often do you visit the AIS Website?

Current Rating: Occasionally

Total Answered: 125

Frequently	42%	52
Occasionally	46%	58
Seldom	12%	15

Some ideas listed for the website are:

Add free-form search.

Make the website more user friendly. (no suggestion on how this could be done)

### Question 7

How often do you visit the AIS Iris Encyclopedia (Iris Wiki)?

Current Rating: Occasionally

Total Answered: 124

Frequently	60%	74
Occasionally	28%	35
Seldom	6%	7
Never	6%	8

It would be great to be able to enter a description of an iris and have it come up with possible matches.

### Question 8

How often do you visit the AIS Facebook page?

Current Rating: Seldom

Total Answered: 126

Frequently	6%	8
Occasionally	14%	18
Seldom	25%	32
Never	54%	68

On Facebook, post something other than what one can read in the Blog or on other Facebook pages...usually people belong to these already. Facebook also has to be posted more frequently to maintain people's interest.

## Question 9

What's the one thing you would do to improve the AIS?

Responses to this were all over the map. There were even several applauding the AIS.

Two themes dominated:

1. Make the general gardening public more aware of iris. A number of specific ideas were given, they are appended at the end of this report
2. Decrease the cost/time of the national convention to make it more accessible.

One response that combined these:

Develop a new version of conventions and regional meetings where the public is made a part of the garden visits and shows to really promote AIS and make the visits to cities something that the public is aware of and can participate in. I don't know how to implement it, but I think it would improve our exposure and encourage new members.

Other comments:

Get better promotion in garden magazines, so that we can gather in people who are garden enthusiasts, not just iris lovers.

More publicity/social presence "iris" articles in paper etc. "out in the world".

Have someone talk about Iris on PBS, Covering AIS, Growing, and shows. Telling the general public what is in their back yard as a resource.

Expand the AIS Internet and physical library,

Regional meetings and National conventions are expensive to attend. That makes the range of attendees somewhat limited. If there were some way to reduce the costs of these gatherings, perhaps more members would attend. Our fall regional has been reduced to a one day affair. We always meet at a site that is central. The facility is free and we cater our lunch. The total expense for such a meeting is usually only about \$25.00 registration. The gas costs are reduced by carpooling. We offer judges training at that meeting, have a business meeting, and hold an auction. We usually have about 30 people attending.

## Question 10

Has your club used the AIS insurance coverage?

The majority responded an enthusiastic 'yes'. The 'no' and 'don't know' were about equal.

## Question 11

Has your club used the AIS Exhibition Toolkit?

About one-half responded 'yes'. The rest split between flat 'no' and 'don't know'.

## Question 12

Has your club used the AIS Marketing Manual?

Only 2 responded 'yes'. Almost all the rest did not know about it. Perhaps an article about it, with a link to the document is needed.

## Question 13

As the parent organization, how can the AIS help our clubs be more successful?

There was lots of advice for us. And some nice positive comments as well, such as:

It is great that the parent organization has so much information available to its members..

Many answered with requests for speakers, presentations, hand-outs and display material.

Also help creating new clubs, visiting regions with few clubs.

Assistance with bylaws and defining officer roles.

There were also two comments to reduce in-fighting.

More suggestions:

Have the Regional Vice Presidents fill all the AIS Board Director positions. Better communication is needed from the Board to the Regions and to the Affiliates.

I think there will be required a hard look at the (c)hanging society in which we live and the need to develop a way to offer this changing society an interesting and relevant way to explore the world of irises -- IN MODERN TERMS!

Provide clubs with materials for programs, informational pieces to hand out at events and a list of speakers that are willing to travel (expenses paid) to clubs to present programs.

Combine the Sections with the AIS. There is too much overlap e.g. articles in newsletters, and 'one-stop shopping' is the trend.

Make the show categories more contemporary. Example the Quilt shows; They have all kinds of modern quilt categories. My friend won in a wall hanging quilt that included computer motherboard parts sewn on a quilted background. AIS iris shows are tied to dated designs specs. No dioramas, no displays, no etc. Open it up to all types of creativity and leave the design judges in the dust.

Continue development of the wiki

Make judges training more rigorous

Make more club resources available online - not just info with someone to call, but actually downloadable.

I believe the awards program needs to be improved. I find it very uncomfortable when filling out the Ballot because no matter how hard you try to see as many gardens as possible in each class there are plants I have not seen and I have no way of knowing if they are better than the ones I have seen. As a result, those hybridizers who get their irises out as guest irises and distribute them widely get the awards and not

necessarily the best irises. The Royal Horticultural Society has a system of trials using a judging panel over a three year period which is effective.

Develop a line of AIS wear (T-shirts, hats, sweatshirts, etc.)--would give a lot more visibility to AIS.

I would try to get the Symposium to members sooner or give a longer deadline for returning it. Our club meets in July and then we don't meet again until our fall potluck, either Sept or Oct. Many clubs may be like this so if AIS could change the deadline to say Oct the 15 or even later then more clubs might have a better chance to get together to get the Symposium filled out and back to AIS.

Make judges training more accessible for those in remote areas, I.e. Online refresher courses for classroom sessions.

Have the officers visit the various regions on a three year rotating. Schedule to better connect with the local clubs within the various Regions.

It would be helpful if clubs had a list of iris members willing to speak at meetings and subjects they would like to talk about.

Also, if each club in a region could make a list of members willing to come and what fee they charge, Then we could combine each list into one list.

It's hard to call someone out of the blue and say" we need a speaker, how about you and what do you charge?"

Get current leadership to involve more younger folks.

Make more club resources available online - not just info with someone to call, but actually downloadable.

Be more responsive to affiliate members' inquiries and suggestions.

And while I have your attention - please don't eliminate the section board meetings from AIS conventions! As a HIPS officer, we depend on those meetings to get our business done, and nearly always have a quorum.

The photos on the Wiki are very popular. But they have replaced, I think, our library of slides. NOT ALL MEETING SITES have internet connections, plus these can be unreliable. We've had 2 recent speakers have computer issues that derailed their presentations. Are we offering any type of current or past libraries of photos?

Are we sponsoring any type of overall iris growing guide updates? not all of us can grow Tall Bearded irises!

AIS should be broad (covering all classes of iris) expansive and digital - excellent progress in the last 10 years!

Affiliate clubs need to be personal and supportive of members, it's the people we know more than the iris who motivate us to get together, and press on

Our affiliate members are older and not greatly computer literate, how can we get together with younger folks who access iris information digitally - would they even want to talk with us?

By providing program materials and current information such as culture for the many types of iris in single programs for each type. , film on selecting , grooming, and staging iris for shows, a film/program on organizing record keeping for the beginner so that iris don't become lost or unidentified, such as acquisition lists, planting charts, a variety of labeling methods, label making , planting with ID markers in bottom of planting hole, in addition to above ground labels, etc.

Stress the importance for members to join a local society first, or along with joining AIS. AIS services such as maintaining registrations, and printing the R & Is plus the 10 year books are the main services that most members receive from AIS plus web information about culture, disease & treatment, etc., if members have access to computers....many older members do not have this.

AIS serves as the umbrella to keep Regions and Affiliates organized as a unit. This is an important organizational function, but the majority of members at large are not concerned with this. Most members who join Affiliate Local clubs do so for information, for social interaction, for free drawings of iris at meetings, AIS current function and therefore its value is a "hard sell" to these people.

Help sponsor speakers at regional meetings. Information and expertise is important to good iris culture.

How do we get people to volunteer, become directors, deal with bad behavior, where to look for programs etc. That will be fun and informative.

The only thing I can think of is to come up with a way to be more in the media so that more people are aware of you and the availability of societies like ours. That is not an easy thing to do and I can't offer any advice on how to accomplish it either. We are working on this in our local area but it's a struggle. Social media could help but since most of us are older (60s and 70s) we aren't very attuned and don't really know how to use it.

I would like to have information pertaining to the legal benefits extended to the local affiliates by AIS. Assistance and advice in writing bylaws. Perhaps a handbook for officers explaining the duties of each office and how to properly fulfill those duties.

Better updated displays and posters available to the clubs for the shows. More support for promoting the national conventions.

What AIS can do is (1) keep an open mind about new approaches to offering information and (2) keep trying to engage the general public's interest to our feature flowers of the Genus Iris (not JUST tall Bearded). Sponsoring and or developing and maintaining public "display" gardens is possibly the best way -- difficult to maintain, but definitely engaging to an otherwise non-engaged public

Respectfully submitted:

Jody Nolin

Affiliate Liaison