

Member Survey 2020

The National Association of Sentencing Commission (NASC) sent out an electronic survey to members at the end of 2019. The goal of the survey was to understand what members found most valuable about the organization and what they would appreciate from their membership in the future. Results are summarized here, the full survey and all responses can be found in Appendix A.

Survey Implementation.

The survey was originally emailed to about 234 potential respondents on December 3, 2019. As there is no current method for individual membership registration in NASC, a stand alone membership list does not exist. Instead, individuals that attended any of the NASC conferences between 2016 and 2019 received the survey. A reminder was sent to the same list on January 2, 2020. In total, there were 60 people that completed part or all of the survey, for an estimated response rate of 26 percent. This is a low estimation, as there were some bounce backs of the 234 email invitations (exact number unknown). The survey closed on January 21, 2020.

Respondent Characteristics.

The majority of respondents (65 percent) are staff of a sentencing commission or council, and another eight percent identified themselves as a member of a sentencing commission. Academics comprised 10 percent of respondents, and nearly seven percent were staff of a research or policy organization (such as VERA or PEW). Another ten percent identified as “other.” These individuals included federal government staff, a team leader of government crime policy analysts, a practicing attorney, an advisory committee to sentencing commission member, and two members of state department of corrections staff.

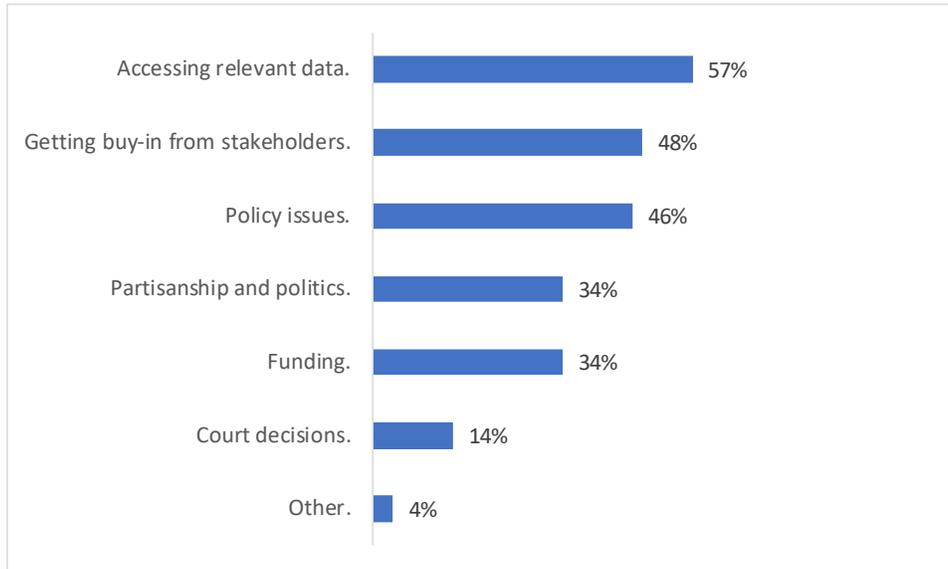
The majority of respondents are long time members and are actively involved in the organization. Fifty-five percent of respondents have been members for six or more years. Seventy percent of respondents attended the most recent NASC conference, in 2019. Another 21 percent attended most recently in 2018.

Purposes of NASC and Common Concerns.

Most respondents (54 percent) identified “networking with other sentencing professionals” as the primary reason they are a member of NASC. An additional 38 percent identified the content of the conferences. Only one respondent indicated that access to resources outside of the conference was the primary reason for their membership. Three respondents specified “all of the above” as the reason for their membership, and one added “learn more about what is going on nationally.”

Respondents were asked what they think are the most important issues currently facing commissions or councils and were able to select as many options as applied. The percent of respondents that answered each response is shown in Figure 1. Of the “Other” responses, these included the need for “academic collaboration that bridges science and practice and policy” and special interest and advocacy groups.

Figure 1. “What do you think are the most important issues facing sentencing commissions or councils today?”

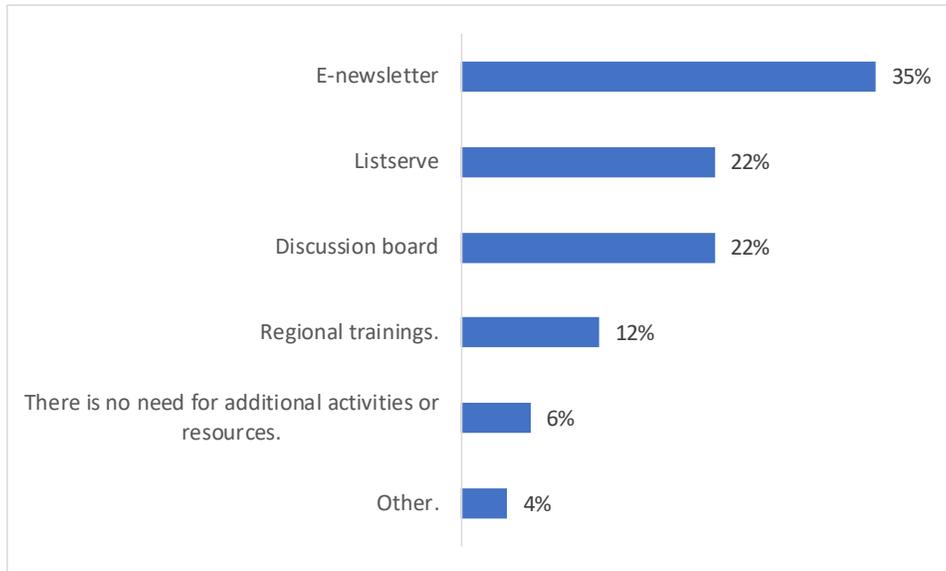


The most common response to this question was “accessing relevant data.” Given that most of these topics were considered “most important” by one-third or more of the respondents, this list may be useful for future roundtable discussions at annual conferences. Particularly considering the responses of the previous question (“What is the primary reason you are a member of NASC?”), discussions centered around the topics listed here could also enable networking opportunities and the sharing of information by commissions and councils across the country.

Future Directions for NASC.

Respondents were asked what other resources or activities they were interested in seeing be developed by NASC. A list of six items (including “other”) was provided and respondents ranked the item in order of interest, from 1 being the most interested and 6 being the least. Figure 2, below, shows the number of respondents that ranked each choice first.

Figure 2. Percent of Respondents that Indicated They were “Most Interested” in Seeing NASC Develop This Resource.



The activities for which members expressed the most interest in NASC developing were an e-newsletter (about 68 percent of respondents ranked this first or second) and a discussion board (46 percent of respondents ranked this first or second). On the other end of the spectrum, the activities respondents were least interested in, were “no additional activities and resources” (over 75 percent of respondents ranked this fifth or sixth) and “other” (85 percent ranking this as fifth or sixth). Members were moderately interested in a listserv and regional trainings. Additionally, there were six additional “other” resources mentioned (as shown in Appendix A), and many of these suggestions involved research or data sharing and collaboration between states.

Members were then asked if they support a nominal membership fee that would support current NASC activities (and any that may develop, such as those mentioned above). The responses were overwhelmingly in support of a fee (83 percent).

Overall Impressions of NASC.

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with NASC as an organization. Eighty-five percent of the respondents indicated they were “Extremely” or “Somewhat” satisfied with NASC. This question was followed with two open-ended questions, where respondents could expand on what they saw as some of the strengths of NASC, as well as some ways that the organization could improve. Full text of all of these responses are found in Appendices B and C. Among the responses for the strengths of NASC, the most common theme is the sharing of experiences and information. As one respondent stated, “I have always benefitted from the relationships I developed through NASC. The ability to reach out to colleagues in other states has been helpful many times.” There was no dominant theme among suggested improvements, though several responses mentioned that at the conference, they would like to be able to know more about what other states are doing.

NASC Member Survey 2020

Questionnaire and Responses

In what capacity are you a member of NASC?

I am staff of a sentencing commission or council.	39	65.0%
I am a member of a sentencing commission or council.	5	8.3%
I am an academic.	6	10.0%
I am staff of a research and/or policy organization.	4	6.7%
Other, please specify:	6	10.0%
Total	60	100.0%

Other:

Staff, federal govt

I lead a team of crime policy analysts in government.

Practicing attorney

Member of Advisory Committee to Sentencing Commission

Member of Department of Corrections Washington State

Director of Adult Probation & Parole, Utah Department of Corrections

How long have you been a member of NASC?

Less than one year.	6	11%
One to five years.	20	35%
Six to ten years.	14	25%
More than ten years.	17	30%
Total	57	100%

In what year did you most recently attend a NASC conference?

2016	3	5%
2017	2	4%
2018	12	21%
2019	39	70%
Total	56	100%

Which of the following best describes the primary reason you are a member of NASC?

Networking with other sentencing professionals.	30	54%
Content of the conference.	21	38%
Access to resources outside of the conference (e.g. email	1	2%
Other, please specify:	4	7%
Total	56	100%

Other:

All of the above **3**

learn more about what is going on nationally

What do you think are the most important issues facing sentencing commissions or councils today? Select all that apply.

	n=51	
Funding.	19	37%
Getting buy-in from stakeholders.	27	53%
Accessing relevant data.	32	63%
Policy issues.	26	51%
Partisanship and politics.	19	37%
Court decisions.	8	16%
Other, please specify:	2	4%

Other:

The Need for More Academic Collaborations that Bridges Science and Practice & Policy
special interest; advocacy groups

Please drag and drop the options below in order of how interested you would be in seeing NASC develop any of the activities and resources below, with 1 being the most interested and 6 being the least interested.

	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six
Discussion board	11	12	13	13	2	0
E-newsletter	18	17	9	5	0	2
Listserve	11	8	16	14	2	0
There is no need for additional activities or resources.	3	3	0	6	28	11
Regional trainings.	6	8	11	12	13	1
Other, please specify:	2	3	2	1	6	37

Other:

SC/academic collaborations on research and programming

Provide links to court databases across the nation

research /grant opportunities

i'd be interested in getting together the data people to mine specific issues - e.g., probation sentences and time served or bail amounts and pretrial holds, etc.

NASC website to provide clearinghouse of relevant reports

Research tools & Cross-state comparisons

To that end, would you support a nominal annual membership fee to NASC for purposes that include, but are not limited to, professional speakers at the conference, technical support or training, and software improvements?

Yes	43	83%
No	9	17%
Total	52	

Overall, how satisfied are you with NASC as an organization?

Extremely satisfied	20	38%
Somewhat satisfied	25	47%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4	8%
Somewhat dissatisfied	4	8%
Extremely dissatisfied	0	0%
	53	

In your opinion, what are some of the strengths of NASC as an organization?

Full results in Appendix B.

In your opinion, what are some areas in which NASC could improve ?

Full results in Appendix C.

In your opinion, what are some of the strengths of NASC as an organization?

- Access to a wide variety of sentencing issues from various state perspectives and information regarding how they addressed these issues
- Allowing for networking with other Commission staff.
- "Forum for exchanging ideas and common problems. Probably my most relevant professional community."
- "I have always benefitted from the relationships I developed through NASC. The ability to reach out to colleagues in other states has been helpful many times. Illinois is a little different than most commissions in that we are not a guidelines state and we are mandated to be directly involved in the legislative process. But those differences do not diminish the value of NASC membership."

I didn't answer the question re: a nominal fee because it wasn't clear if states that continued to go to the conference would have to pay the fee too. And of course, how nominal is nominal? It would be anyone's guess each year as to whether I could get sign-off on a membership fee. "

- I have been to the conference for two years in a row and it was very good.
- Info sharing
- Institutional memory and expertise of the people within NASC.
- "'-It is the only organization that keys on state sentencing issues.
-Great collaboration with academia, Pew, CSG and others.
-Annual conferences are usually helpful for stakeholders"
- It seems most sentencing commissions/staff are interested in NASC and its work
- It's low-key and professional. It attracts people who are have experience and insight (those don't always go together). The members are committed to making things happen, and although I know that it's not frictionless or without "politics" (it's a human endeavor), most of that seems to have little effect on the conferences. The conferences that are the focus of NASC's work are reliably excellent. Its diversity of professions and participants makes it especially valuable -- not all academics or all lawyers or all policy people. It's remarkable that what began rather ad hoc in the early 1990s is still relevant and growing.
- Number of commissions participating
- People with expertise and passion; good networking opportunities; minimal posturing.
- Sharing information among Sentencing Commissions
- Small network, very state-specific focus that differs across states. Allows for each state to share unique stories and individual solutions to their questions/problems.
- The ability to bring Commissions together to share experiences.
- The National Meetings are More Intimate
- The networking and information sharing.
- The networking with other Commissions is invaluable
- "Unfortunately, this commission does not have independent funding (we rely on the agency in which we are located) and, thus, has not been able to send anyone to the NASC conferences since 2011."

The ability to communicate and seek responses and thoughts from other commissions on topics we are working on is extremely helpful. It allows commissions to learn what is of interest across the country as well as learn from those who have walked that path."

In your opinion, what are some areas in which NASC could improve?

- A bit stale; I never know when the meetings are coming or what's planned; it seems like a small club of old friends, so not very inviting of "new blood" (even though I find all the members quite friendly)
- A listserv or easier way to contact the other commissions would be helpful.
- At times it appears that NASC focuses and support specific agendas/positions. I believe that NASC should be neutral and not viewed as supporting specific issues. Each state operates in a different political environment and NASC should be a resource to all states.
- Better conferences
- Funding Opportunities
- I would like to know about the successes other states are having. It would be great if every Commission could report some laws that have been passed to reduce the prison numbers and for that information to be dispersed to everyone.
- I would suggest including in the conferences some contextual presentation - hearing from people who have survived the system; victims of crime; family members of the incarcerated. Do one thing each conference that's out of the geek box and of greater human interest. The other thing that is coming up here is addressing long term sentencing - is anyone actually doing it? Overall, NASC is what I need it to be - a resource that does not demand too much time and attention.
- More engagement with academic community, especially on research projects
- More frequent updates of website and content provided on website.
- More speakers from actual sentencing commissions sharing their experiences and challenges; less focus on re-entry and more on up front sentencing, more panel presentations that provide varying perspectives on sentencing related issues.
- Other than once a year, we are very disconnected.
- Pew and other such agencies have hijacked NASC and have made for the conference less attractive
- "There are always one or two individual programs at the conference that don't quite make the mark, but that's the case with every conference. Not sure how to improve that.

In the past 15 or so years, many budgets have been cut and people who were important participants in earlier years (or their organizations) haven't been able to attend. I'm not sure if regional conferences what help more people participate, but they shouldn't happen at the expense of the main conference. What is the feasibility of having the plenary sessions live-streamed so that people whose travel budgets(or local politics) won't let them attend can participate? Seems like this might be more suited to the times than regional conferences. One of the values of NASC is the annual sharing across the entire country (and Scotland, England, Korea, etc., etc.). I would like to see the newsletter again.

Thanks for asking! Wishing us all a bright and productive 2020 -- Teri White Carns, Alaska"

- Time for states to share/contribute their work. Time is limited and insufficient funding for states to contribute more.
- "Unite to resolve issues related to criminal histories and FBI policies (i.e., access to data, quality issues and inaccurate and missing convictions on rap sheets).
Allow for discussion of more basic technical issues (e.g., training techniques, basic use of software and automation, accessing court records).
Avoid focusing on the ""flavor of the day"" and be a resource for sound and accurate information on sentencing policies."
- ""-Without dedicated staff to the organization, it's very difficult to maintain continuity since leadership changes frequently.
-Finding relevant topics for the conference is always a challenge"