

Board Brief

Designed for Club Board of Directors

March 2025

WHAT'S HOT:

The Importance of Succession Planning in Club Management

Succession planning is one of the most critical responsibilities of a club's leadership, ensuring the seamless operation of a complex and multifaceted organization. Yet, it is often overlooked or deferred until a crisis arises. As stewards of historic institutions, we must approach succession planning as both a strategic imperative and a safeguard against the unexpected.

At the Cosmos Club, we recognize that succession planning is about more than just filling positions—it is about preserving the legacy, values, and operational excellence that define our institution. Whether addressing the planned retirement of senior staff or preparing for unforeseen circumstances, having a clear and actionable plan in place ensures the Club remains resilient and forward focused.

Comprehensive Succession Planning Across the Organization

Succession planning is not solely the responsibility of the General Manager. While I am ultimately accountable for overseeing these efforts, it is essential that each department develops its own strategy to address leadership transitions. This is particularly urgent as a significant portion of the workforce approaches retirement. Department heads, with guidance and oversight from the General Manager, should identify potential successors, map out development plans, and ensure institutional knowledge is passed along effectively.

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Investing in succession planning demonstrates our commitment to our teams. It signals that we value their growth and development and positions the Club as an employer of choice. Moreover, a well-executed plan protects the Club's operational continuity, strengthens member confidence, and mitigates risks associated with sudden changes in leadership.

Personal Succession Planning for the General Manager Role

Planning for the succession of the General Manager is equally vital. At the Cosmos Club, my personal succession plan aligns with my current contractual agreement. At contract end and to maintain flexibility, my tenure is reviewed on an annual basis, with extensions determined one year at a time. Once a retirement date is established, the Club will initiate a formal search process and transition plan, ensuring ample time for thoughtful and deliberate decision-making.

This long-term approach not only facilitates a smooth leadership transition but also allows the Board and senior management to prepare for the cultural and operational shifts that often accompany a change in executive leadership.

Emergency Succession Planning: A Proactive Approach

While long-term planning is essential, clubs must also prepare for unforeseen events, a concept often referred to as the "hit by the bus" scenario. The unexpected loss of a key leader can be destabilizing for any organization. Recent tragedies in the corporate world serve as a stark reminder of the importance of having an emergency succession plan in place.

An effective emergency plan ensures that the Club can maintain stability and continuity even in the face of sudden adversity. At the Cosmos Club, our plan includes:

1. Pre-Determined Search Committee:

- A search committee structure is established in advance, with roles clearly defined. While specific individuals are not named, the framework is designed to allow immediate activation.

2. Temporary Leadership Structure:

- The Club President works with the senior leadership team and Executive Committee to assess interim leadership options, whether from within the organization or through external resources.
- A designated senior staff member may serve as temporary liaison and acting General Manager to maintain continuity.

3. Clear Communication:

- Transparent and empathetic communication are critical. Members must be informed promptly and reassured of the Club's operational stability during a challenging time.

4. Timely Search Process:

- The process to appoint an interim or permanent General Manager should be swift but deliberate, ideally completed within three to six months.

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Why Succession Planning Matters

Succession planning is not just about preparing for change, it is about cultivating a culture of leadership, resilience, and forward-thinking. For clubs, where tradition and innovation must coexist harmoniously, effective succession planning ensures that transitions are not disruptive but rather opportunities for growth and renewal.



The process also reflects our broader responsibility to the membership. Clubs are not static entities; they are living organizations that evolve with time. As stewards, it is our duty to ensure the institution's enduring success through thoughtful planning and preparation.

Every club is unique, and each will need to tailor its succession strategies to its culture, resources, and needs. However, the fundamental principles remain the same: proactive planning, clear communication, and a commitment to leadership development at all levels.

By embedding these principles into our operations, we ensure that our clubs are not only prepared for the future but thrive in it. In doing so, we honor the legacy of those who came before us while building a foundation for generations to come. 

Insights by Mitchell Platt, MCM, CCE. *Platt is the General Manager of the Cosmos Club, a historic private club in Washington, DC. With decades of experience in club management, he is a passionate advocate for leadership development and operational excellence in the private club industry. He was the CMAA National Chairman in 2022.*





BY THE NUMBERS:

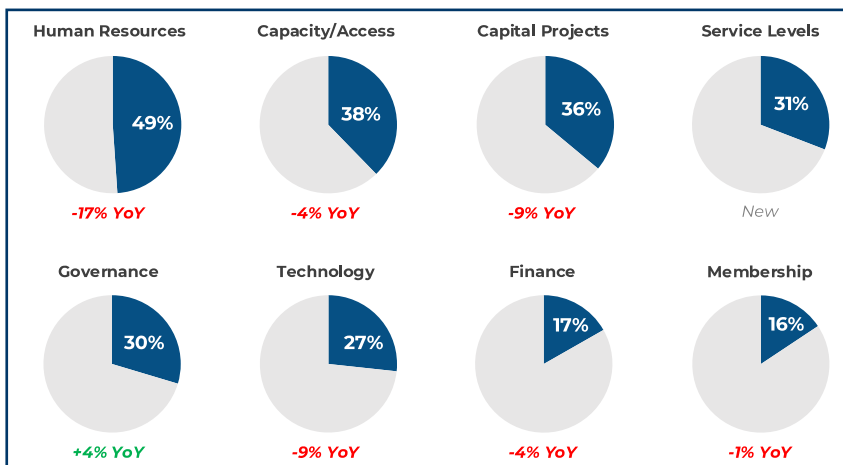
Club Leaders' Perspective: Operations Trends and Challenges

The Club Leaders' Perspective Report captures the pressing needs of club management professionals and examines the emerging trends and challenges these individuals face. In this edition, we'll take a look at data regarding Operations, but you can find more data in the full report.

Future Operational Changes

Club leaders still face significant challenges in their clubs, even as many of these challenges continue to contract. Only governance increased compared to last year.

While many of the same challenges exist, with only capital projects moving down the list (from 2 to 3), larger clubs generally all indicate a lower concern across all challenge areas except for human resources.



City or Athletic clubs and Marina/Yacht clubs indicated a higher level of agreement on these areas of future challenge, while seasonal clubs viewed significantly fewer concerns with finance, technology, governance, and access concerns.

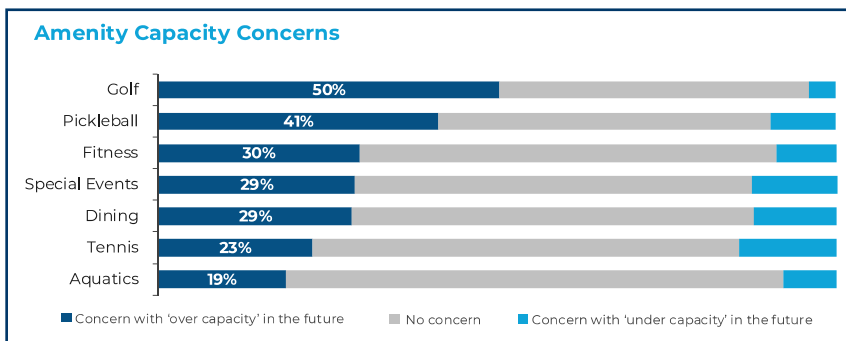
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Understanding Capacity Concerns

Capacity continues to be a challenge, especially for golf and pickleball, even as 49 percent of Club Leaders indicate they are at capacity.

While golf and pickleball continue to represent the largest access challenges, results show that approximately 30 percent of Club Leaders are concerned with overcapacity for fitness, special events, and dining.

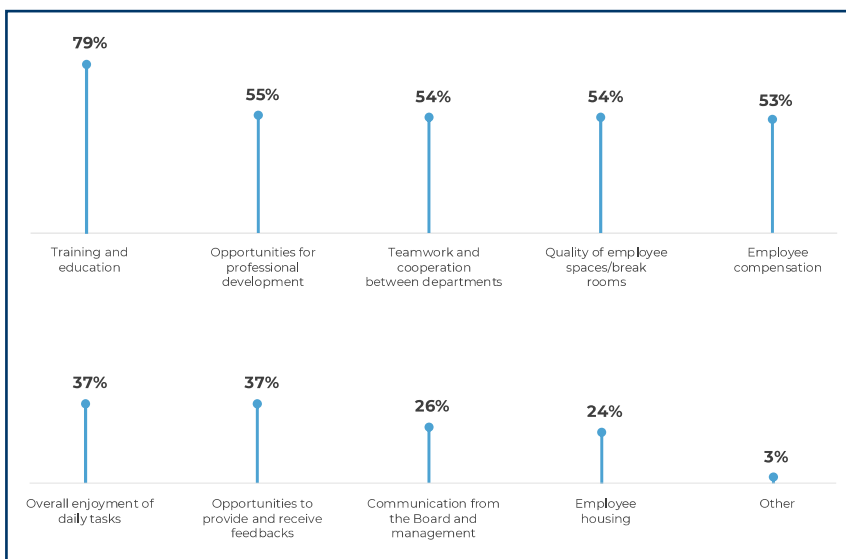
Tennis (15 percent) and special events (13 percent) emerged as areas with the greatest perception of being under capacity, along with dining (12 percent). Overall, 1 in 10 respondents are concerned about excess capacity at their respective clubs.



Improving the Employee Experience

Leaders continue to look for opportunities to improve the employee experience, with those areas intended to grow the employee's capability being front and center.

One of the greatest concerns for the year ahead is attracting and retaining employees. To address this concern, Leaders are focused on improving the employee experience and increasing operational efficiency by emphasizing training and professional development across all sizes and types of clubs.



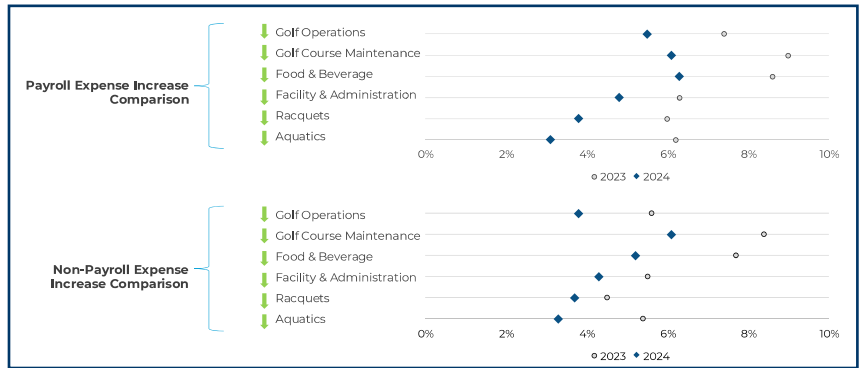
Of notes is the significantly higher interest of larger clubs in providing employee housing to support their recruitment and retention efforts compared to small- and medium-sized clubs.


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Positive Changes in Expense Growth

Leaders indicated the expectation of decelerated expense growth in 2024 across all core departments in both payroll and non-payroll expenses.

Expense growth is projected to return to more manageable levels in 2024 based on Club Leader budget expectations. Food & Beverage and Golf Course Maintenance continue to be the top areas of expense growth, both exceeding 5 percent on average.



CMAA members may access their complimentary copy of the full report through [CMAA Connect](#) in the [Best Practices Exchange Community Library](#) in the [CMAA Annual Reports](#) folder. 





INSIGHTS:

Five Key Steps to Earn Members' Support for Facilities Projects

When planning significant upgrades or changes to a private club's facilities, the process often involves intricate planning, financial commitments, and a broad vision of how the club will evolve. The most important steps to ensure the success of a project, however, engage club members in the facilities master planning process.

Members are not just the stakeholders who will use the facilities—they are often the ones who will approve or disapprove a project, support it financially, or contribute their time and energy to make it a reality. Here are the five key steps for getting members involved early and meaningfully to ensure a facility project's success:

1. Build Member Buy-In

When members feel their opinions are valued and incorporated into the planning of new projects, they are more likely to support them, especially if an assessment is needed. If they feel excluded from the decision-making process or that a plan that does not meet their needs, they may become disengaged or opposed to it.

A master-planning process that includes members also ensures that the design and functionality of the new spaces, such as dining venues or a fitness facility, will align with their expectations. Engaging members in the process helps to build a sense of ownership and personal investment in the outcome.

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2. Gain Valuable Insights and Feedback

Private club members are not just customers, they are often passionate individuals with specific needs and desires that a general design firm might not consider. Engaging members in the master-planning process gathers valuable insights that can lead to more effective, user-centered designs. Soliciting feedback through surveys, focus groups and town-hall meetings is vital for creating a plan that resonates with the community and reflects their collective vision. It can also help to identify potential areas of concern, such as increased costs or disruptions to regular club activities early in the planning stages, so adjustments to mitigate potential opposition can be made.

3. Foster a Sense of Transparency and Community

Engaging members in the facilities master planning process creates an environment of transparency, to show that the club leadership is being open about the project's goals, timelines, and potential impact. This builds trust between the club's decision-makers and its members, fostering a sense of community. When members feel informed and part of the process, they are more likely to feel connected to the project and its outcomes.

Regular communication is also essential in this process. By keeping members updated on progress, addressing their concerns, and adjusting plans where necessary, leadership demonstrates its commitment to listening to them. This ongoing dialogue can help to reduce any potential opposition that may arise and ensure that the final proposal is not only acceptable, but also exciting for many members.

4. Secure Financial Support


Large-scale projects often require significant financial investments, including member assessments or increases in capital and/or regular dues. In some cases, member donations may also be solicited and needed to help get a project off the ground.

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When the membership is engaged and feels positively about the plan, they are more likely to support whatever funding efforts are necessary. They will also be more inclined to advocate for the project, helping to rally others in the club to join the effort. This grassroots support can be instrumental in gaining the necessary momentum to secure project approval and funding.

5. Mitigate the Risk of Opposition

Without member involvement, any major project is at risk of encountering resistance from those who disagree with the planned changes or feel excluded from the process. Resistance can take many forms, including vocal opposition at meetings, a general lack of enthusiasm, or even the refusal to fund the project. When members are part of the conversation from the start, they are more likely to embrace changes that reflect their contributions, reducing the chances of contentious debates or failed initiatives.

Involving private club members in the facilities master planning process is not just a matter of being polite—it is a strategic necessity. The success of any project depends on member buy-in, financial support, and a sense of community ownership. By actively engaging members, club leadership ensures that the project meets members' needs, fosters transparency, and minimizes opposition. Ultimately, this collaborative approach increases the likelihood of project approval and helps to ensure its long-term success. 

Insights by Christian W. Coulter, CCM, ECM, CMAA Fellow, Vice President of Club Consulting, McMahon Group






EXTERNAL INFLUENCES:

CMAA Joins Community Impact Coalition

CMAA is working to prepare for possible tax challenges as Congress’s priorities shift to addressing expiring tax cuts and identifying new revenue sources, potentially targeting non-profits. Members of Congress, their staff, and key influencers in Washington have turned their attention to a variety of potential resources that could be tapped for tax revenue in 2025 to fund priorities, including the resources of the entire 501(c) community. Concerns are rising that tax-exempt organizations may be at risk with some calling for a 21 percent corporate tax rate on all net, non-donation income.

CMAA has joined the coalition organized by the American Society of Association, the Community Impact Coalition. The Coalition is committed to ensuring lawmakers understand the value of 501(c) organizations and advocating against proposals that would eliminate their tax-exempt status. To date more than 70 associations and charities, representing a diverse range of sectors, have joined the Coalition.

Learn more about the Coalition at cicoalition.org/. 



CMAA NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS:

What is the Certified Club Manager (CCM) Designation?

Developed by educators and professionals in the club industry and launched in 1965, the Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation is acknowledged worldwide as the symbol of excellence in club management. The CCM is awarded only to those club management professionals who complete a combination of industry-specific education and pass a rigorous examination. The CCM recognizes skills and special knowledge in areas such as club governance, leadership, and financial management in clubs. Once the designation is earned, the CCM must maintain their level of knowledge with ongoing education.



Another benefactor of the CCM program is the club as an employer. Certification can be valuable for an employer's reputation. Employees who have earned the designation through industry specific training, work experience, and assessment have demonstrated a level of competence that can affect the perception among the club membership.

Other benefits to hiring a CCM include:

- Validating the competency of the club manager. Having a CCM on staff may ensure that your employee possesses current, relevant skills that afford them deeper insight into the industry, and a higher level of overall competence. With knowledge of recent trends, the latest regulations, and new and developing options, your CCM will become the "go to" person in directing the club.
- Promoting staff retention. By providing employees with opportunities to grow their talents and master new skills through the CCM program, you are demonstrating a commitment to their professional development that can translate into greater company loyalty.
- Assisting with managing risk. The CCM exam test applicable laws and regulations related to industry. Employees with knowledge of these laws and regulations can assist with steering your club through potential problems, make recommendations that may prevent complications, and provide the club governance with advice.

The CCM is a globally recognized designation for club management professionals and the standard by which individuals demonstrate their professionalism in club management. Approximately 1,500 CMAA members hold this prestigious designation. Earning the CCM is a valuable achievement and a professional advantage for club management professionals at any stage of their career.

Learn more at cmaa.org/learn/certification-programs/ccm/. 




UPCOMING EVENTS:



Governance & Leadership Symposium on April 16

Do you want to be better prepared for your role as a club leader? Attend CMAA's next Governance & Leadership Symposiums on April 16. These one-day, virtual events are specifically designed to bring together the GM/CEO/COO and their club's Board Members for collaborative education and leadership development.

These Symposiums offer actionable insights and tools to strengthen club governance, and you will walk away with a deeper understanding of your role and valuable strategies to improve your leadership contributions. Presented in partnership with KOPPLIN KUEBLER & WALLACE, a CMAA Executive Partner, these highly rated sessions provide a unique opportunity to gain new perspectives and foster stronger partnerships between club management and elected leaders. 

Learn more and register now at

cmaa.org/learn/meetings-and-events/governance-leadership-symposiums-2025/.

