

ACVIM MEMBER VALUE PROPOSITION

August 2021

Membership Committee

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Introduction

The Membership Committee of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) was tasked with creating a Membership Value Proposition. The value proposition would help Diplomates better identify with the ACVIM as members, separate from being ACVIM Board-certified in a specific specialty. Its purpose is to better connect Diplomates to the ACVIM and establish the organization as being integral to their career in veterinary internal medicine.

Process

The Membership Committee engaged Association Laboratory, a full-service research and strategy firm that focuses solely on membership associations, to assist in the creation and execution of this process.

The key areas of the process were discovery, member outreach, and analysis.

Discovery. Association Laboratory reviewed existing ACVIM data to determine a baseline of needs and interests that members shared in earlier research. The information gleaned served as the basis for a qualitative survey, which was sent to Diplomates, candidates, non-Diplomate DVMs, and veterinary technicians. The questions for non-Diplomate DVMs and veterinary technicians focused on those audiences' prior engagement with the ACVIM through the ACVIM Forum.

The Committee distilled the findings from the qualitative research into three general themes:

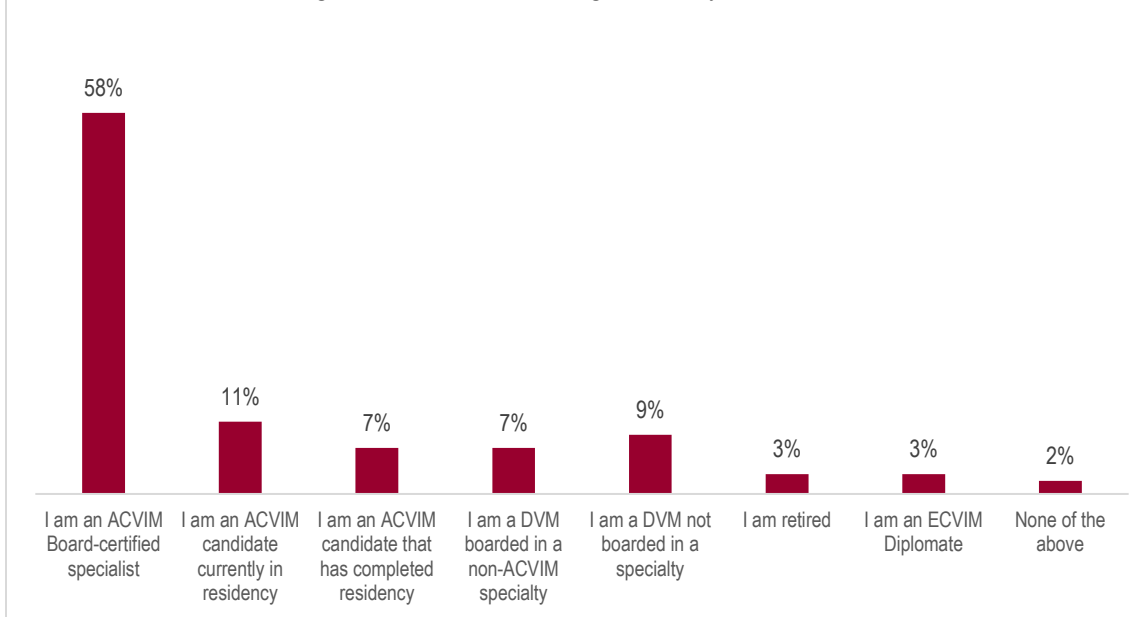
1. ACVIM Diplomates are passionate about their specialties, but many feel financial pressure related to student debt obligations.
2. Diplomates are concerned about maintaining a sustainable work-life balance, mental health, and overall sense of wellbeing.
3. Members desire support, guidance, and education in topics such as career planning and transitions, financial management, and business training.

Member Outreach. These themes provided the basis for a more detailed quantitative survey, which the Committee distributed to all ACVIM members, including candidates, as well as DVMs who had attended the ACVIM Forum within the previous five years. The goal of this quantitative survey was to better understand the themes, identify how the ACVIM could best support Diplomates' success, and inspire a meaningful connection to the community.

Sample and Demographic Characteristics

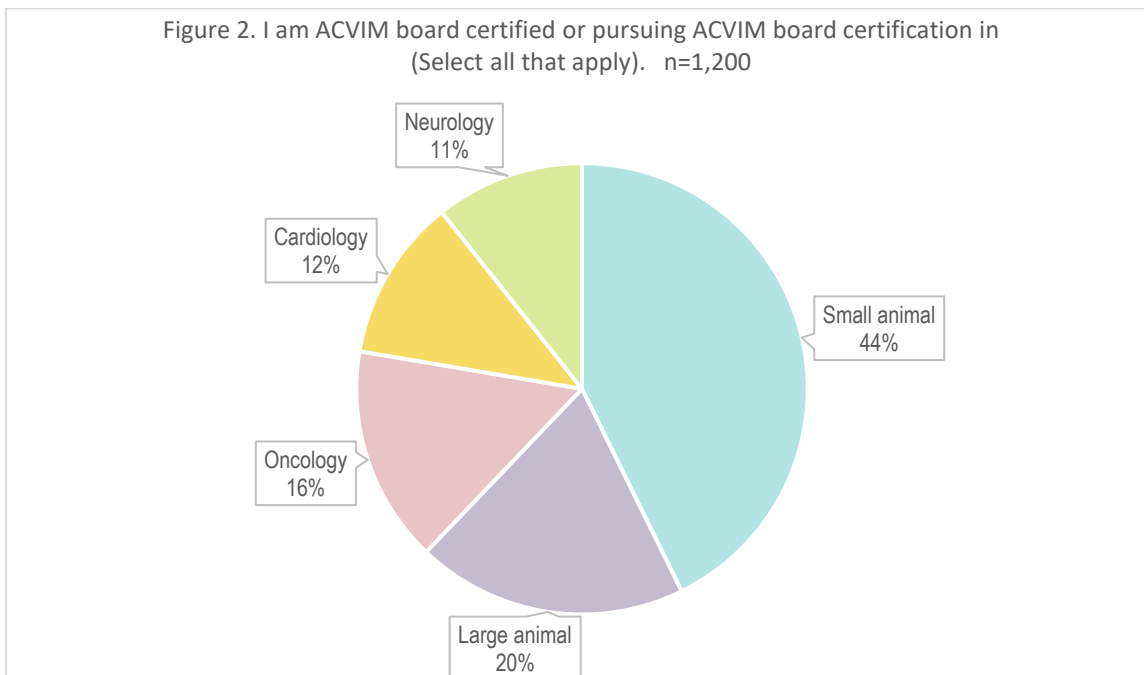
A survey was sent to 7,564 valid email addresses from the ACVIM database on February 15, 2021. The survey remained open until March 5, 2021. The overall survey response rate was 21%. The response rate specific to Diplomates was 29%. Significance tests were performed at the 95% confidence level. Highlights from the findings are described in the following pages of this paper, and the aggregated data set is available to [download from the ACVIM website](#).

Figure 1. Which of the following describes you? n=1,581



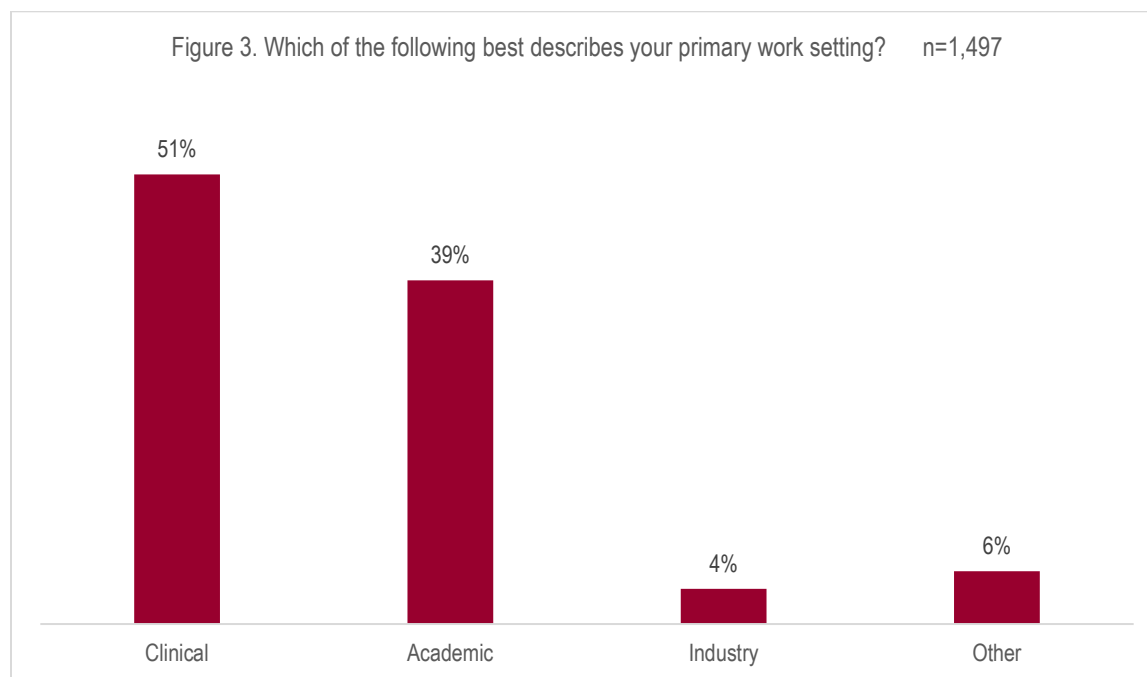
The majority of respondents were ACVIM Board-certified specialists (58%) or ACVIM candidates (18%, combining those who are currently in a residency and those who have completed one). If a respondent indicated a response of “I am retired” or “None of the above,” they were not offered the option to complete the survey.

Figure 2. I am ACVIM board certified or pursuing ACVIM board certification in (Select all that apply). n=1,200



The majority of respondents held or were pursuing board certification in small animal internal medicine. Twenty-three respondents were boarded in two ACVIM specialties. That sample was too small for meaningful analysis; therefore, responses from dual-boarded Diplomates were included with their large or small animal internal medicine certification.

The Membership Committee reviewed the breakdown of the data to determine whether there were significant differences in perspective by specialty. The Committee determined that there were no statistically significant differences in the data that warranted independent review at the specialty level.



The majority of respondents work in a clinical setting, which includes specialty private practice, general practice, traveling specialist and mobile specialist. For this analysis, a traveling specialist was defined as someone who fulfills a specialist role at a number of clinical hospitals or facilities, whereas a mobile specialist was defined as one who uses a mobile unit to make calls at a farm or a residence.

An analysis by work setting revealed differences in the expressed needs and interests of members from these various audiences. These were considered in the resulting recommendations and plans for future action.

Analysis: The Membership Committee considered the data in the following context:

- What insights did the data provide about the current needs and challenges of ACVIM members?
- How were these needs and challenges unique to different specialties?
- What can the ACVIM do in those areas to support member success and connection to community?

Consensus Strategy Development: Through a series of meetings, the Membership Committee generated ideas for what types of programs and solutions had the potential for meaning and relevance based on the information derived from this needs assessment. The Committee presented a set of preliminary recommendations to the Board of Regents in June 2021. After subsequent revisions to more accurately reflect the ACVIM's prioritization of diversity, equity and inclusion activities, the Committee developed a conceptual framework for preliminary activities. Additionally, the Committee defined a value proposition statement, which reads "*Membership in the ACVIM furthers expertise and knowledge, enhances career success and facilitates community with lifelong connections.*" This philosophy, coupled with the framework and focus areas, will serve as the basis for executing a multi-year strategy to enhance ACVIM member engagement. The remainder of this report provides the details of the framework, the corresponding action items and the data that provide the rationale for each.

Actions and Reasoning



Based on its analysis of the data from both the qualitative and quantitative surveys, the Membership Committee will focus on building products, programs, or services in these areas. Diversity, equity and inclusion are reflected as both a focused category and a foundational perspective on which these pillars are built.

Although they are depicted as discrete categories, the Membership Committee recognizes the interconnectivity between these pillars. For instance, if the ACVIM develops tools for business support, they will likely alleviate some individual member stress and therefore address overall wellbeing. Similar overlaps exist in the categories of mentorship; diversity, equity and inclusion; and candidate support. Ultimately, the Membership Committee recognizes that the greatest impact of any activity will result from viewing the needs of members relationally and holistically.

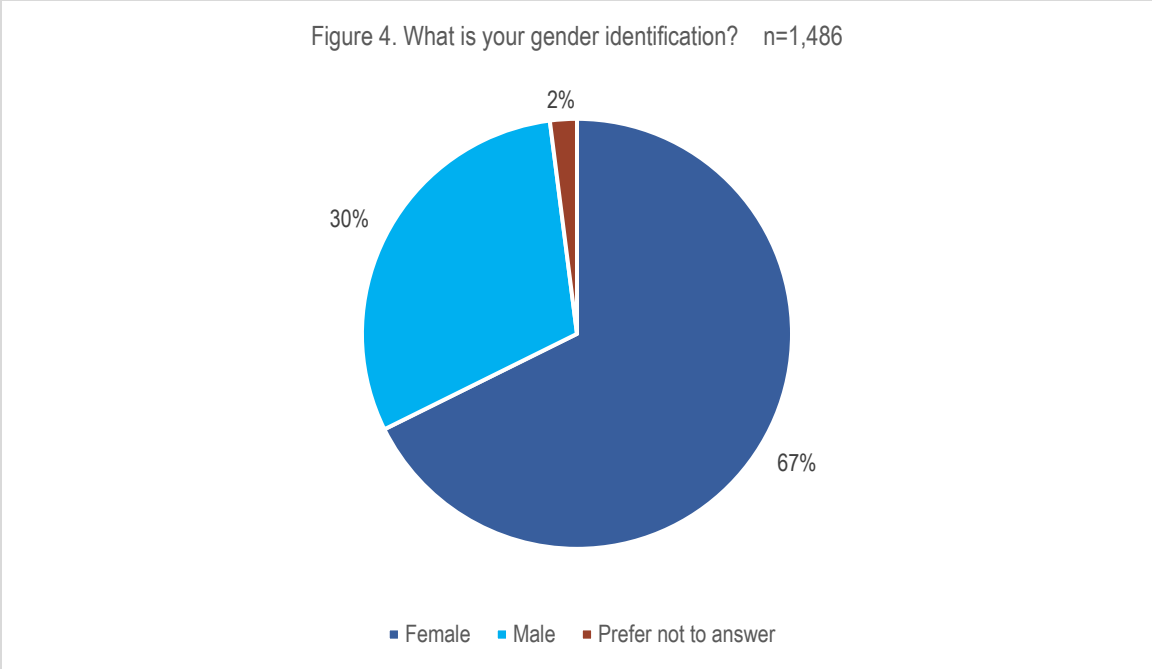
Below is a breakdown of tactics that the Membership Committee is pursuing under each pillar as well as the data that helped determine that focus. Inherent in the Committee's work will be the exploration of ways to enhance existing offerings or collaborate with external groups or internal committees already working in these areas.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

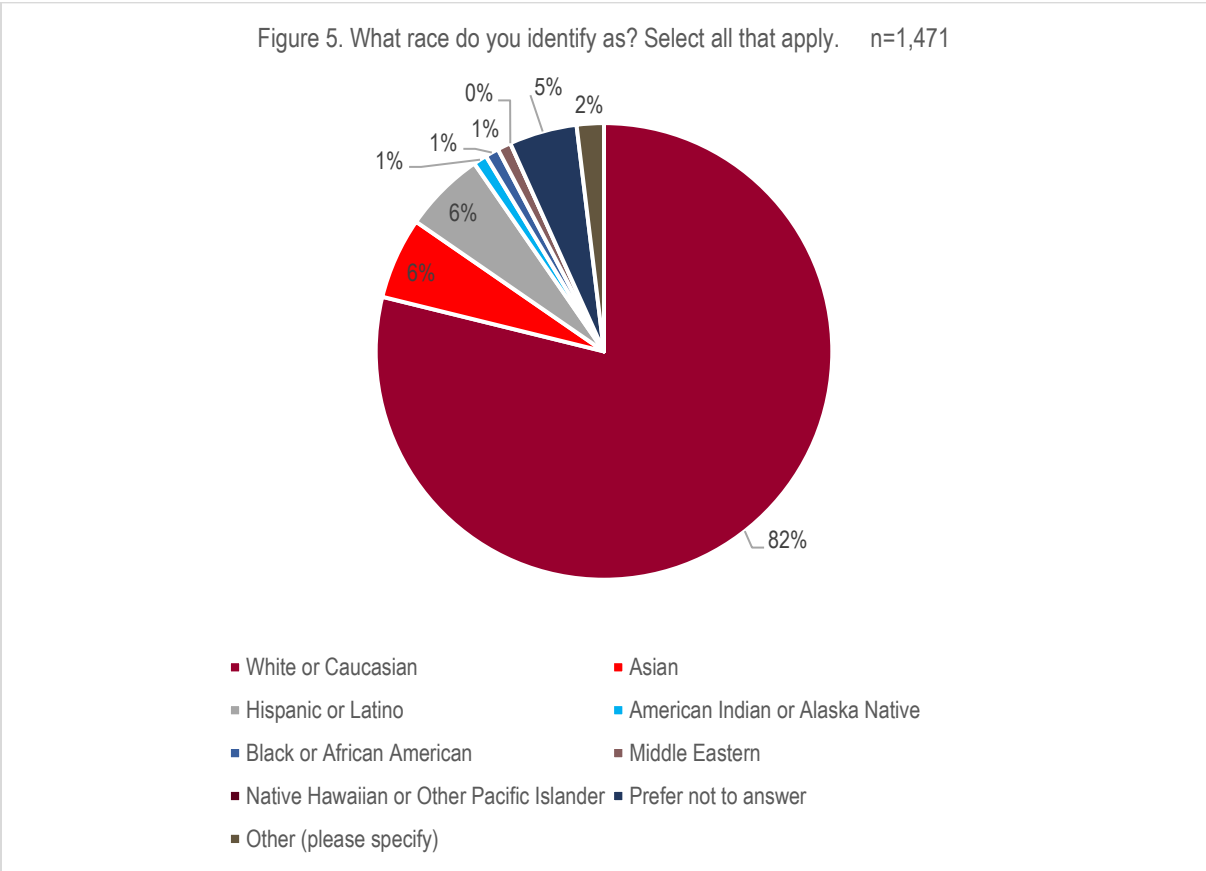


ACTION ITEMS:

- Support and collaborate with a standing ACVIM DEI Committee.
- Perform an internal assessment to identify opportunities to build a wholly inclusive community.
- Intentionally develop a ballot of future leaders that reflects our values of diversity and inclusion.
- Provide the entire board and staff with formal DEI training.

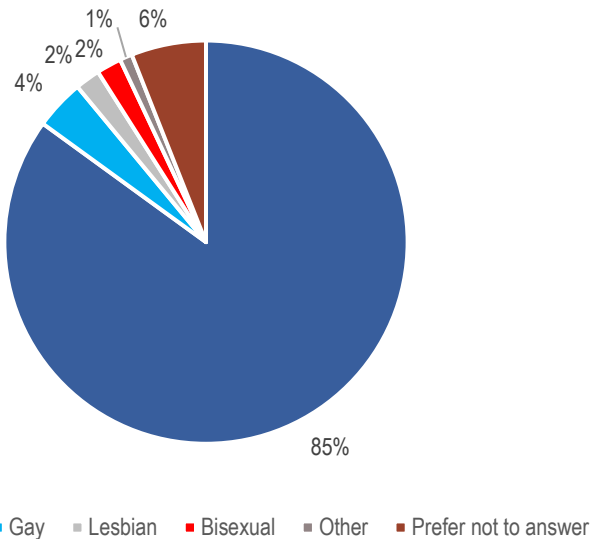


The DEI Task Force added additional options to this question. Four respondents identified as nonbinary, and one identified as other.



The majority of respondents were white (82%), with Asian (6%) and Hispanic or Latino (6%) as the next largest groups.

Figure 6. Please identify your sexual orientation (regardless of relationship status). Check all that apply. n=1,471



The DEI Task Force added some demographic questions, including this one, to get a better understanding of the diverse composition of ACVIM's membership.

In the fall of 2020, in response to direct requests by members, the ACVIM convened a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force to identify and investigate how issues of diversity and inclusion pertain to the ACVIM and to propose measures for board consideration. The Task Force made the recommendations listed above, and the implementation has already begun. Based on the data from the survey, the Membership Committee prioritizes DEI as a focused pillar for further development. The Committee also depicts DEI as a value that transcends all areas to ensure the ACVIM's commitment to DEI is a foundation for building the member experience.

Business Support

ACTION ITEMS:



- Build or expand existing business leadership courses, tailored to candidates and Diplomates, providing curriculum both universal and related to unique elements of clinical versus academic practice.
- Offer education around telehealth, including how to use tools to track time, accept payments and deliver technical support.
- Develop or use existing benchmarking resources that provide evidence of compensation practices, work hours and practice management.

Figure 7. What are the top 3 areas on which you spend the majority of your time in a typical year? Select up to 3. n=1,495



Responses indicate that after clinical practice, many areas that occupy the largest percentage of members' time were business-related.

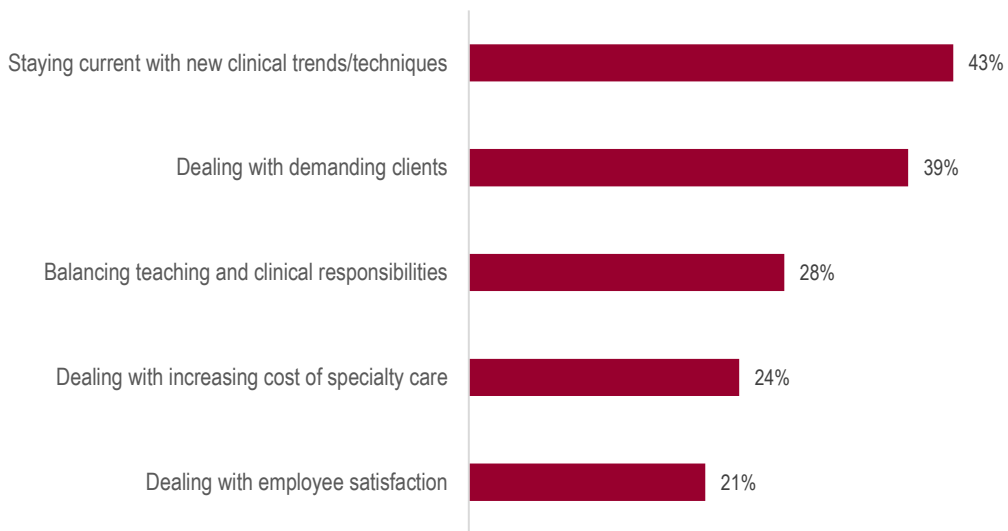
The themes that emerged from the qualitative survey included work/life balance, staffing issues, competition and finding research funding in the academic space. These themes were further described in the findings from the quantitative survey.

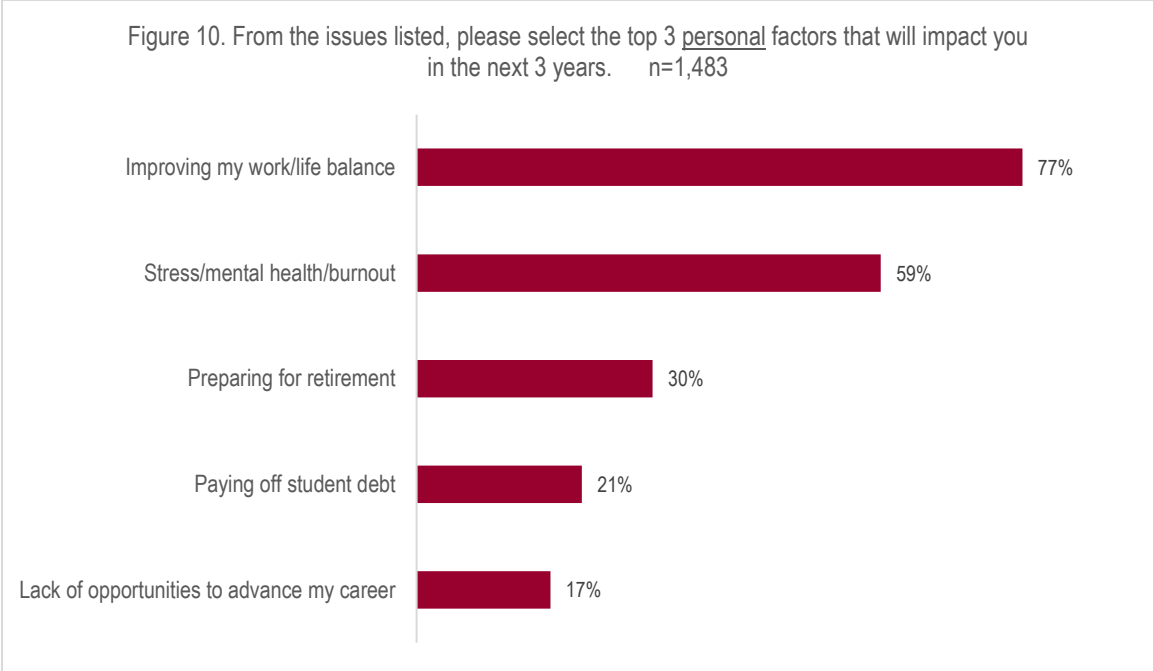
Further, the data indicate that members spend a significant amount of time on business-related tasks, including staff supervision and training, business administration or management, research administration or management and marketing the practice or hospital. Developing Diplomates' business acumen, providing learning opportunities around leadership and sharing tools to enhance awareness of telehealth practices can increase member efficiency in key areas.

Figure 8. From the issues listed, please select the top 3 workplace factors that will impact you in the next 3 years. Select up to 3. n=1,478



Figure 9. From the issues listed, please select the top 3 practice factors that will impact you in the next three years. Select up to 3. n=1,492

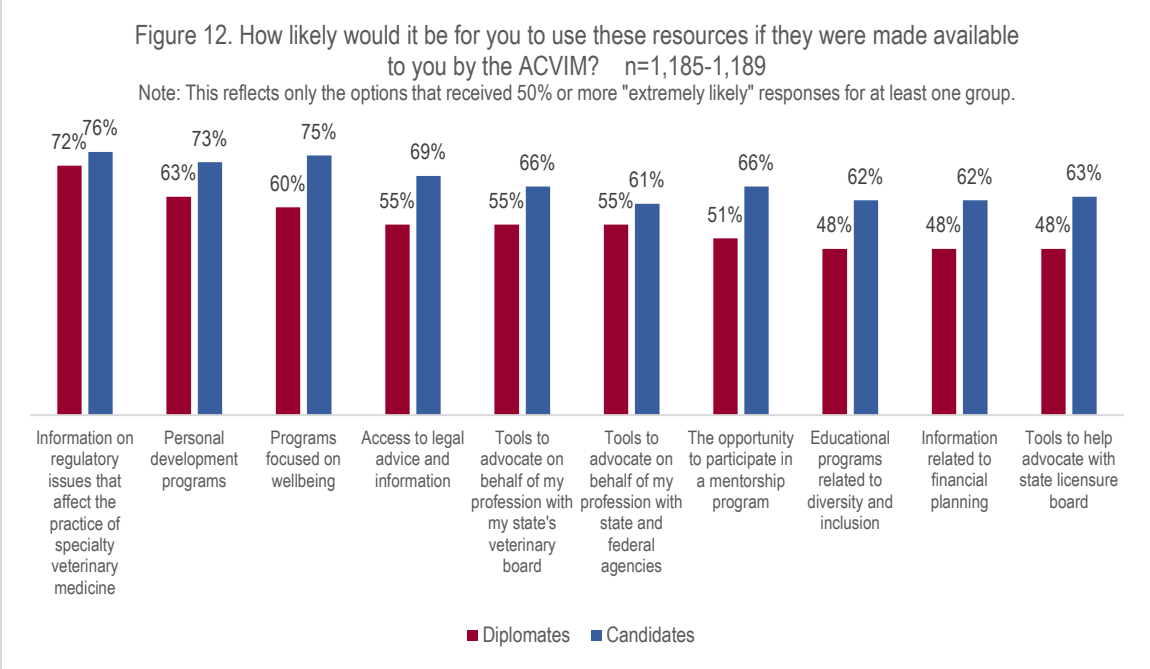
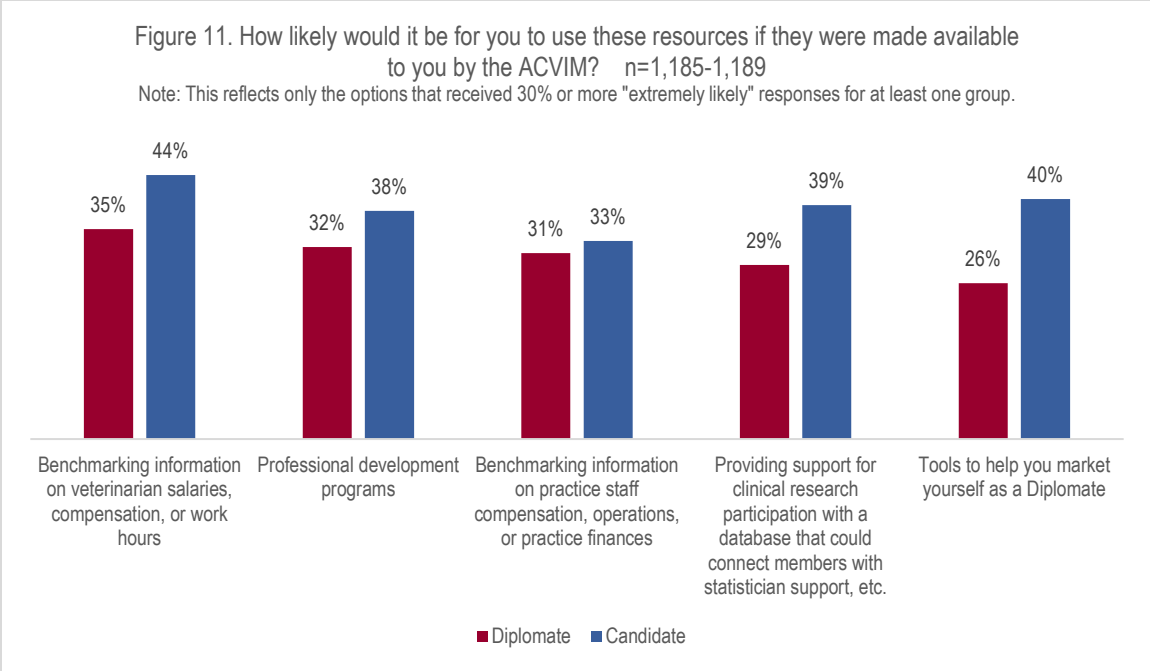




Respondents were asked to consider factors that will impact them in three different areas: workplace, defined as the place in which you practice; practice, defined as the work you do to care for animals; and personal, defined as issues that impact you and your personal life.

In the survey, the ACVIM also explored a series of potential programs to understand their relevance to member needs and likely member interest. The responses revealed that at least 30% of members would be extremely likely to use benchmarking information, professional development programs, and tools that would help them market themselves as a Diplomate (see Figures 11 and 12 below).

In addition, 50% of Diplomates and candidates would be extremely likely or very likely to take advantage of personal development programs, programs focused on wellbeing and opportunities to participate in a mentorship program (see Figures 11 and 12).



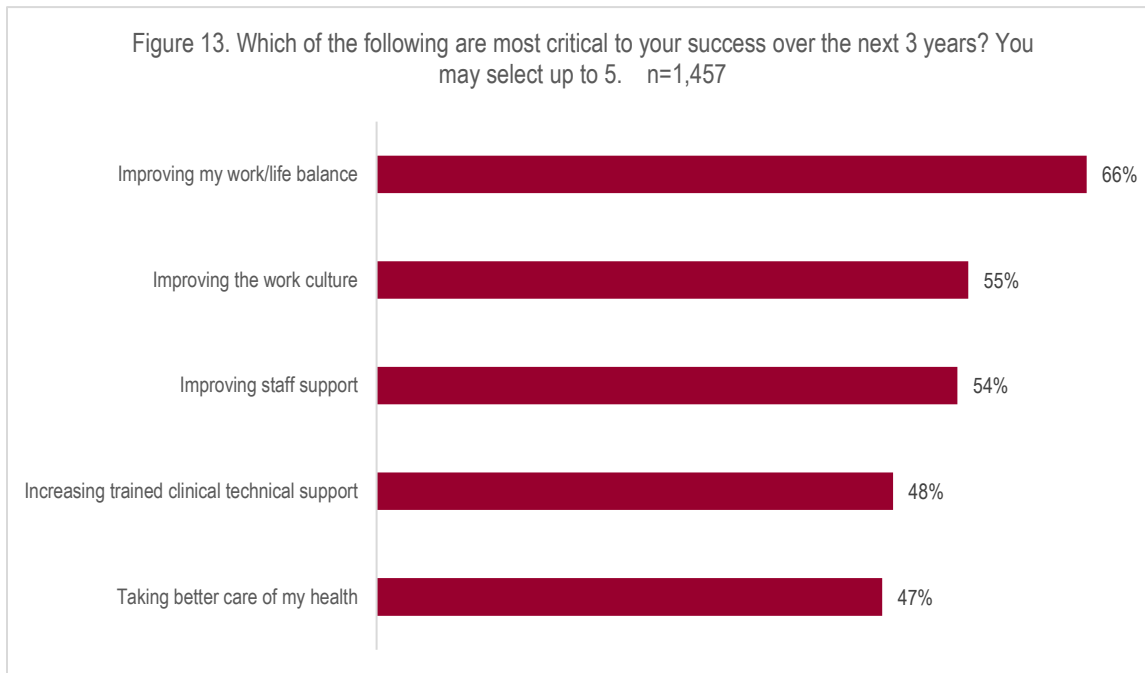
Diplomates expressed interest in engaging with a number of highly ranked resources that support advocacy efforts and improving their understanding of regulatory impacts on the profession and practices. The ACVIM, through its active representation in the American Board of Veterinary Specialists (ABVS) and the Veterinary Specialty Organizations Committee (VSOC), is privy to knowledge of advocacy-related activities. The Membership Committee agreed that improving communications to members about these activities, along with information on how to become involved, would be an effective way to address this expressed interest.

Wellbeing



ACTION ITEMS:

- Conduct and publish the findings from an environmental scan that informs the challenges affecting members over the next 3 years and that describes existing mental health and wellbeing offerings that serve the profession.
- Establish and/or use an existing volunteer group to explore the issue of wellbeing and make recommendations for action.



Respondents identified work/life balance (66%), improving the work culture (55%), and improving staff support (54%) as the top three areas that will be critical to their success in the coming years.

As indicated in Figures 8, 9, and 10, it is apparent the majority of Diplomates believe that work/life balance and stress, mental health, and burnout will significantly impact them in the next three years. They indicate that identifying solutions to address these challenges will be critical to their success.

The Membership Committee believes this presents an opportunity for the ACVIM to identify and nurture partnerships with organizations that are actively addressing wellbeing issues. In addition, the Membership Committee, in partnership with other ACVIM committees and staff, will audit existing ACVIM offerings. The Committee will determine whether the existing offerings can be expanded or communicated so the connection to wellbeing is more prominent. In cases where there is a clear opportunity to develop a benefit that addresses wellbeing, the Membership Committee will consider how to best approach and prioritize that option.

Mentorship



ACTION ITEMS:

- Evaluate industry resources that support mentorship opportunities and could support the ACVIM membership.
- Establish a task force to evaluate and create a mentorship program that would benefit mentors and mentees.

Throughout the data, respondents identified the need to recalibrate work/life balance, manage stress and prevent burnout as critical to their success.

This information validates the anecdotal experience of many established Diplomates who shared that connecting to others who have navigated universal challenges was critical to their satisfaction and success. Having support, both professionally and personally, will help Diplomates deal with burnout and stress.

In addition, since mentorship is such a large part of residency programs, the Membership Committee believes there is potential value in extending mentorship availability into the first five years of the new Diplomate journey. Although the technical aspects of practice settings vary, the competencies associated with mentorship—such as showing empathy, engaging in thought partnership, offering practical guidance and making connections—transcend academic, industry and private practice settings. The Committee recognized that a mentorship program has equal benefits for more seasoned Diplomates, who indicated a desire to give back to the profession and leave a lasting and positive legacy on the ACVIM.

Multi-Faceted Marketing Support



ACTION ITEMS

- Continue to build out resources on [Vetspecialists.com](https://www.vetspecialists.com).
- Provide Diplomates with tools to help distinguish themselves as specialists.
- Guide Diplomates in how to communicate the opportunities offered by the growing practice of telehealth.

The ability to effectively communicate the value of specialty veterinary care, both to primary care veterinarians and the animal-owning public, has the potential to address both the business and personal satisfaction needs of Diplomates. In exploring interest in various programs designed to support the business goals of members, including “tools to help you market yourself as a Diplomate,” 40% of Diplomates expressed interest in such a product.

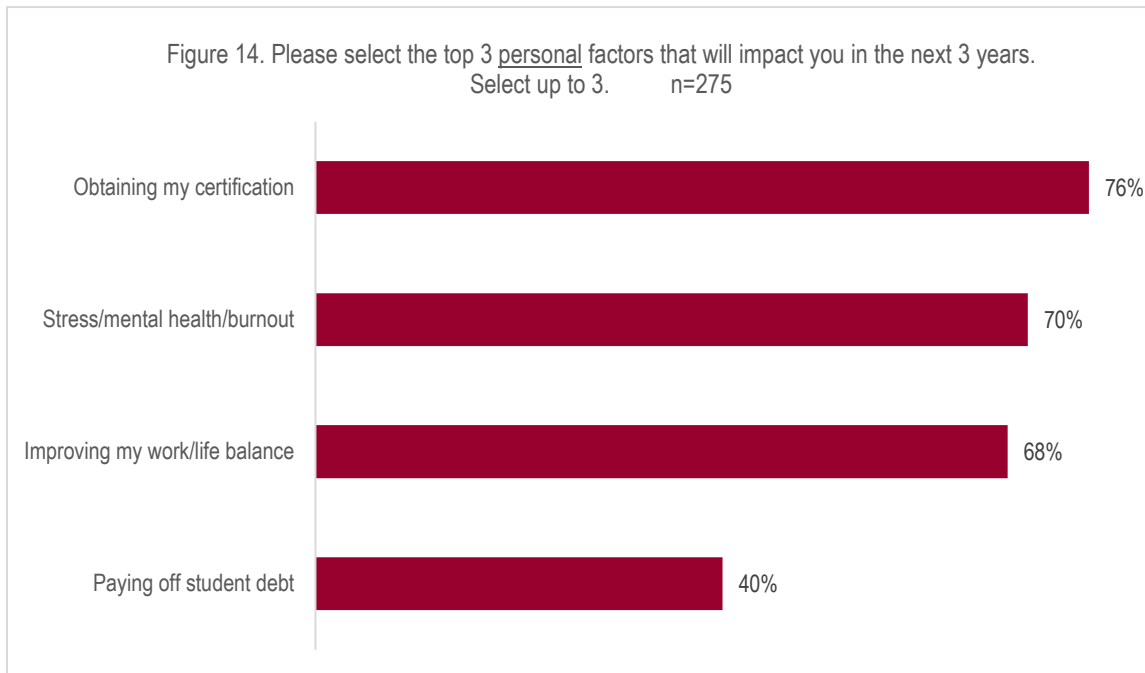
Diplomates described a need to improve awareness of specialty veterinary medicine to the animal-owning public. Respondents identified a related challenge in articulating their role in veterinary medicine to primary care veterinarians. The launch, marketing, and maintenance of [VetSpecialists.com](https://www.vetspecialists.com) will provide an important resource for the public to identify and select a specialist. However, the Membership Committee acknowledges there are additional

areas in which the ACVIM can support Diplomates in marketing themselves and their unique contributions to animal health. One idea is to develop resources to share with DVMs and the public about veterinary specialty medicine, the use of telehealth in specialty medicine, and the triad of care, which is defined as the relationship existing between the animal owner, the primary care veterinarian, and the Board-certified veterinary specialist.

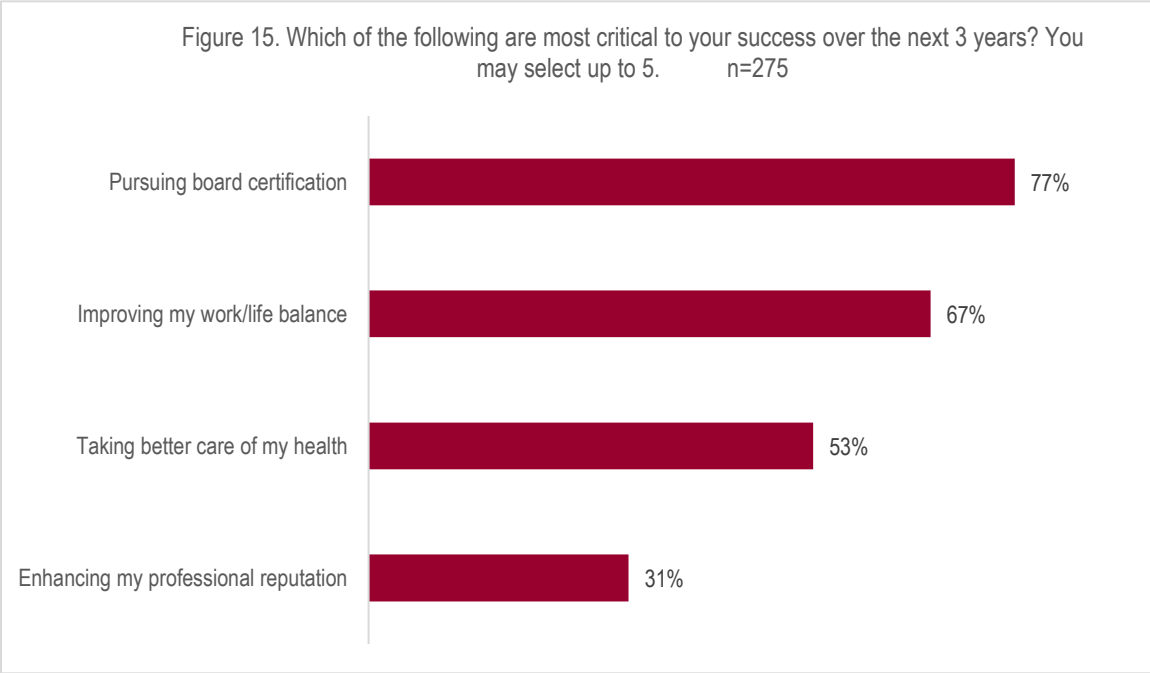
Candidate Support



- Actively engage and provide services for candidates.
- Expand network opportunities between peers in different hospitals and residencies.
- Create mentoring opportunities between Diplomates and candidates.



Obtaining certification and paying off student debt are two personal factors that candidates feel will affect them in the next three years.



Compared to Diplomates, candidates identified different factors that will be critical to their success in the next 3 years, including board certification and enhancing their professional reputation.

Survey findings indicate that 76% of candidates define their primary personal priority as obtaining certification, with 77% indicating that achievement of that goal is the number one factor in their future success (see Figures 13, 14, and 15). While the ACVIM provides support to candidates throughout their residency training, feedback indicates there is little targeted support related to exam preparation. There is also a lack of outreach or engagement once a candidate becomes a Diplomate. Supporting success on exams and establishing a strong connection immediately after becoming a Diplomate are two areas in which the ACVIM looks to extend its engagement efforts.

Next Steps

The Membership Committee will now partner with staff and other volunteer groups to identify how to best prioritize and develop approaches to meet the needs identified from this assessment. The initial effort will involve a thorough audit of what already exists or is in development so prior investments of time and effort are fully used. Similarly, the ACVIM will pursue partnerships with groups with similar goals, so we can work together for maximum impact. Where the ACVIM discovers programs best suited to develop unique solutions to defined needs, the board and staff, guided by the Membership Committee, will define and implement those activities. In addition, a brief survey designed to measure current engagement and satisfaction will be used to establish a baseline metric from which to evaluate the effect of these efforts.

The Membership Committee is grateful to all who have shared their input and guided the work to develop our value proposition. We are committed to ensuring that membership in the ACVIM furthers member expertise and knowledge, enhances career success, and facilitates community with lifelong connections.

Membership Committee

Cameon Ohmes, DVM, MS, MBA, DACVIM (LAIM) – Chair

Lucas Pantaleon, DVM, MS, DACVIM (LAIM), MBA – Co-Chair

Harold McKenzie, DVM, MS, MSc (VetEd), FHEA, DACVIM (LAIM) – BOR President Ex-Officio

Bill Tyrrell, DVM, DACVIM (Cardiology) – VetSpecialists.com Subcommittee Chair

Christine Swanson, DVM, DACVIM (Oncology) – Scientific Editorial Board Chair

Ashley Boyle, DVM, DACVIM (LAIM) – Forum Committee Chair

Ellen Behrend, VMD, PhD, DACVIM (SAIM) – Academia Representative

Heather Kvitko-White, DVM, DACVIM (SAIM) – Specialist in Private Practice Representative

Eva Sikorska, DVM, DACVIM (Cardiology) – Cardiology Representative

Amy Polkes, DVM, DACVIM (LAIM) – LAIM Representative (Equine)

Gretchen Grissett, DVM, MS, DACVIM (LAIM) – LAIM Representative (Food Animal)

Trevor Moore, DVM, DACVIM (Neurology) – Neurology Representative

Sarah Gillings, DVM, DACVIM (Oncology) – Oncology Representative

Ewan Wolff, PhD, DVM, DACVIM (SAIM) – SAIM Representative

Shannon Carter, ACVIM Chief Strategy Officer – Staff Liaison

Marian Tuin, ACVIM Membership Manager – Staff Liaison