

NTA Membership: Benefits and Opportunities

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The mission of the Nebraska Turfgrass Association (NTA) is to “provide better turf for all aspects of the industry including athletic fields, cemeteries, golf courses, lawns, parks, roadsides, institutional grounds, sod production, and other turfgrass areas.” The NTA accomplishes their mission through hosting and supporting industry-related activities, including networking, education, and training events, as well as sponsoring research.

As a member of the NTA advisory board, I recently reflected on the value of membership to the organization. In 2024, an annual individual membership was just \$50. This begs the question, what do you get for \$50 and is it worth it?

A significant part of evaluating membership value lies with the costs. Last year, members received a \$20 discount for attending the UNL Turfgrass Research Field Day, a \$20 discount for pesticide recertification, and a \$100 discount on conference registration fees. Member conference exhibitors also received a \$200 discount on booth space. If you plan to attend the conference, the savings easily pay for an individual membership and closely compare to the cost of organizational (\$150 annually) or sustaining (\$250 annually) membership levels.

But the cost of membership is just one piece of the equation. According to years of survey data, networking with peers is among the most important reasons for attending NTA events. Members often report that the NTA-sponsored field day, conference, and golf tournament are their only opportunities to connect with friends from across the state. We have many dedicated professionals in the industry, and many are formally recognized for their contributions to the industry and organization by NTA awards. Turf students have also been supported by the NTA with scholarships and travel awards to attend national conferences.

The organization has hundreds of members, and substantial funds are generated each year through membership and event registration fees. So, how does the NTA use these funds? Events aren't free and together they account for the largest portion of the budget. Managing the organization and external service fees (accounting, legal, website hosting, marketing, credit card fees, etc.) are another significant expense but are a reasonable cost of doing business.

When there are surplus funds, the NTA donates some of them to support turf research and education. I am particularly passionate about these donations because they partially support the University of Nebraska Turfgrass Science Program, contributing an average of \$36,000 per year over the past 10 years. These funds support student training and applied research that benefit the industry.

Over the past 10 years, UNL has completed hundreds of research studies to optimize fertility, pesticide use, irrigation, mowing, aerification, seed and sod production, and topdressing practices. Some of our ongoing research is typically shared at field day, and a summary of selected studies can be found in our 2024 program's annual report (<https://go.unl.edu/2024unlturfreport>). Many of the projects listed were supported by NTA donations.

These funds also help maintain our field research facilities, which in turn support student training. The facilities on East Campus in Lincoln give students access to field space and equipment to gain exposure to important turfgrass management practices. We are proud that most of our students pursue turfgrass industry positions post-graduation, supporting industry work force demands. We currently have 27 students in our program, all of whom are required to complete two internships before graduation, contributing to facility management at their internship locations.

In addition to student training, UNL Turfgrass Science Program staff and faculty also provide educational opportunities for professionals. For example, our turf program coordinates with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to offer pesticide recertification at conference. We provide educational content through our social media and turf program website and give several talks about our areas of expertise each year.

Reflecting on the value of NTA membership, I believe there is a substantial return on the membership investment. As part of this thought exercise, we have started evaluating how we can better serve the industry through our university research and outreach initiatives. We request that you take a few minutes to complete the following survey if you haven't yet (<https://go.unl.edu/turfindustrysurvey>). The survey collects basic information about you and identifies areas where we can better support you and the state's turf industry. If you have specific suggestions for improvement, please reach out.