



Member Priorities Survey Summary

The 462 members of the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) were surveyed between April 22 - May 1, 2022, to provide member input to the organization priorities and activities. 130 members completed the online survey, representing a 28% response rate. Respondents rated the importance of each area using a 1 -5 scale with 5 being extremely important to 1 being not at all important. Members were also given the option to include a reason for their rating.

Executive Summary of TOGA Member Priorities Survey

The members prioritized the TOGA guiding principles as follows: (listed in rank order)

1. TOGA promotes oyster gardening aquaculture in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. (4.76 out of 5)

Representative Comments:

- *More oyster aquaculture and restoration the better.*
- *One of the few areas where more is better for the bay ecosystem.*
- *Helping the Bay and enjoying your own oysters are important.*

2. TOGA educates interested citizens in oyster aquaculture methods. (4.69 out of 5)

Representative Comments:

- *More people growing oysters is good.*
- *Education is key to spreading the word and getting more folks to grow oysters. For sustainability of the bay and to grow own food source.*
- *Oysters are my favorite food and I want everyone to help the oyster to survive and do well here.*

3. TOGA promotes the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries through oyster cultivation. (4.63 out of 5)

Representative Comments:

- *Everyone needs to understand the role of the oyster ecosystem.*
- *It's the #1 reason I joined TOGA. I believe the Bay is a severely threatened ecosystem and by cultivating oysters to help filter my little creek I will do my part to save the Bay.*
- *I hope that the oyster helps to improve the environment health of the Chesapeake Bay although I have seen only anecdotal evidence and no scientific evidence as proof.*

All three of the guiding principles were considered very important.

The members prioritized the following activities to implement the guiding principles: (listed in rank order)

- 1. TOGA provides SPECIFIC OYSTER GARDENING RESOURCES such as aquaculture oyster floats and accessories that can be used to grow your own oysters. (The sale of these items are fundraisers for TOGA.) (4.53 out of 5)**

Representative comments:

- We need to make it easy for gardeners to start or continue gardening.*
- TOGA is the source for resources*
- Without this feature it would be hard to be an oyster gardener.*

- 2. TOGA provides ADULT EDUCATION such as outreach events (farmers markets, oyster festivals, educational lecture series), oyster exhibits in local museums, oyster gardens at Virginia State Parks, and the Master Oyster Gardeners (MOG) course presented biannually in conjunction with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS.) (4.52 out of 5)**

Representative comments:

- It increases the number of knowledgeable citizens.*
- I not only believe this is important, but I volunteer to work as many of these events as I can.*
- This combines education and the information needed necessary for being an effective oyster gardener.*

- 3. TOGA members who are Master Oyster Gardeners provide specific OYSTER GARDENING ASSISTANCE for people interested in growing their own oysters with setting up their oyster garden and dealing with environmental issues. (4.35 out of 5)**

Representative comments:

- Have been learning from their efforts and knowledge so far!*
- More outreach from the masters to the novices would be helpful*
- Teaching and gardening assistance grows the members and the number of people joining the ranks of oyster gardeners*

- 4. TOGA provides YOUTH EDUCATION such as the Middlesex County, Urbanna Oyster Festival education day for 4th, 5th, and 7th graders, TOGA's Annual Middle School Writing Contest, and an oyster sanctuary reef at the YMCA Camp Kekoka in Lancaster County which allows TOGA to show young campers how oyster aquaculture improves Chesapeake Bay. (4.24 out of 5)**

Representative comments:

- Educating young people creates awareness of oyster farming contribution to the environment and encourages adoption of safe handling and growing techniques.*
- We need to create an awareness to the younger generation to sustain our efforts for the future.*
- Wonderful for young generation to understand how aquaculture is necessary for the health of the bay.*

5. TOGA SUPPORTS SPECIAL PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS such as an endowed scholarship at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences or rebuilding the dock at the YMCA Camp Kekoka in Lancaster County. TOGA conducts fundraising for these and other special projects. (3.81 out of 5)

Representative comments:

- *TOGA should give back to the community*
- *VIMS is a better fit with our goal. YMCA is a lesser fit. Keep it focused*
- *Good work, but impact is lower than other activities*

The top four activities were all rated very important, only special program and projects ranked as somewhat important.

What is the main reason you are a member of TOGA? (117 responses)

Note: Almost all the respondents provided an answer to the main reason they are members of TOGA. Some key responses include:

- *Interest in aquaculture and the health of the Bay.*
- *To get up to date information on oyster gardening, oyster events such as opportunities to purchase oyster spats, oyster float material and talk with oyster gardeners.*
- *I believe in supporting this natural resource as it pertains to the health of our ecosystem, plus I enjoy raising and eating oysters.*
- *I was interested in learning about growing oysters, where to buy the spat, etc. Wonderful and very informative Club!*
- *To grow oysters responsibly.*

“The one thing I wish TOGA would do is. . .” (82 Responses)

Some key responses include:

- *Try to find a way to get in front of more landowners who have the capacity to grow oysters.*
- *Increase interaction of members*
- *Hold more events on the Northern Neck*
- *Have a larger presence in and on the Peninsula (James river - Elizabeth river)*
- *Offer more mini courses on Zoom*
- *Update the website*
- *Oystermobile!!*

Anything to add? (29 responses)

Some key responses include:

- *I feel this is a great organization and I'm proud to be a member. Thanks to everyone that makes this work.*
- *I highly encourage the close association with VIMS and hope they continue to find us worthwhile.*
- *Keep up the good work! (And you could probably raise your dues...)*
- *Thanks for all you do!*