



**USA Working Equitation Membership Survey  
2024 Results Report**

November 2024

Survey created and conducted by USA Working Equitation Strategic Planning Task Force  
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# Part I: Introduction

## Background

In early 2024, the USAWE Board of Directors formed a Strategic Planning Task Force. The task force is working to create a strategic plan to guide the USAWE Board of Directors and committees so each group is working towards the same mission-focused goals for the organization. As part of this process, the task force created this survey to obtain feedback from membership. In addition, the task force has been conducting interviews with a variety of other stakeholders (licensed officials, affiliate organization leaders, show managers, and others). Throughout this process, in addition to obtaining feedback, the task force is interested in communicating updates and results. This report contains an overview of the results from the 2024 membership survey and is intended to be shared widely throughout the organization.

## Survey Methodology and Limitations

The 2024 membership survey was created using Google Forms with a combination of open-ended, drop-down options, multiple choice, and Likert Scale questions in the general categories of demographics, participation, and membership satisfaction. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to all current USAWE members via email twice during a two-week window in early October, 2024. In addition, a reminder to check email for the survey invitation was posted on the USA Working Equitation Facebook page, and several regional directors, along with other members not on the Board, shared that reminder.

Although the survey was intended to be completed by members only, it was important to the survey team that the survey be completely anonymous. As a result, no identifying or membership information was collected so it is possible that nonmembers completed the survey (USA Working Equitation did NOT publicly share the link). Based on an analysis of survey results, we do not believe nonmembers completing the survey was a widespread issue or one that greatly influenced results.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The members of the Strategic Planning Team created this survey for the purpose of informing the strategic planning process for USA Working Equitation. At the time the survey was created and shared, the team members were all on the USA Working Equitation Board of Directors and/or were USA Working Equitation Committee Chairs. All Strategic Planning Team members expressed an interest in the success of the organization and created the survey with that intention in mind, along with the goal of informing the strategic planning process. In addition, it is important to note that at least some of the Team members completed the survey while it was open since all were members of USAWE and thereby eligible to respond.

The author of this report, a trained researcher with an understanding of data analysis and objectivity, completed the analysis and synthesis of data and the preparation of this report using Microsoft Excel with the help of AI tools to summarize qualitative data. Such tools were used to increase the objectivity of the analysis. However, it is important to disclose that the author is presenting this report as an active member and amateur competitor in USAWE (currently at Level 1) and as a regional director on the USA Working Equitation Board. It is also important to note that the author is not a USAWE licensed official.

## Part II: Results for Demographic & Multiple Choice Items

### Response Rate

Using active membership data as presented by the membership committee in October 2024, the response rate to the survey is as follows:

Region <sup>1</sup>	# of Surveys Completed	Total # of Members	Response Rate (%)
1	75	309	24%
2	66	287	23%
3	22	69	32%
4	16	83	19%
5	50	141	35%
6	47	131	36%
7	29	121	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>27%</b>

It is important to note that some of the total responses are not attributable to these seven regions due to some international members and some respondents who selected “other” for location. Those responses are analyzed as part of the total but excluded from the regional analyses.

### Equestrian Organizations

USAWE members shared many different organizations that they currently or previously belonged to reflecting the diversity of our organization. Below is a selection of organizations named by members, listed in no particular order:

USEF	USDF	Cowboy Dressage	AQHA
European Rodeo Association	Mounted Posse	4-H	High School Equestrian Teams
Other Breed Associations	US Eventing Association	WDAA	IALHA
Backcountry Horseman	Progressive Hoof Care Practitioners	PATH	Pony Club
North American Trail Riding Conference	Cowboy Mounted Shooting Assn	Ranch Sorting of America	

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<sup>1</sup> Membership regional map can be found here: <https://usawe.org/we-community/membership/>

## What Members Say Is Important to Them When Participating in a Competition or Event

How important is **Travel Distance** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	38%	37%	44%	50%	38%	32%	33%	45%
Somewhat important	55%	57%	52%	45%	56%	64%	62%	45%
Neither important nor unimportant	4%	3%	3%	5%	6%	4%	7%	3%
Somewhat unimportant	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	7%
Not at all important	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

How important is **cost** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	34%	37%	35%	41%	31%	36%	26%	28%
Somewhat important	56%	52%	59%	55%	56%	56%	64%	45%
Neither important nor unimportant	8%	7%	6%	5%	13%	6%	6%	21%
Somewhat unimportant	2%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	3%
Not at all important	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%

How important are **Volunteering Opportunities** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	7%	5%	3%	14%	19%	4%	9%	7%
Somewhat important	36%	31%	39%	27%	38%	26%	45%	41%
Neither important nor unimportant	41%	45%	36%	41%	44%	46%	38%	41%
Somewhat unimportant	6%	7%	6%	5%	0%	10%	6%	0%
Not at all important	10%	9%	15%	14%	0%	14%	2%	3%

How important are **Camaraderie/Friendship** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	67%	68%	61%	68%	75%	62%	72%	66%
Somewhat important	27%	21%	30%	23%	19%	34%	26%	34%
Neither important nor unimportant	5%	8%	8%	9%	6%	4%	2%	0%
Somewhat unimportant	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not at all important	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

How important are **High Quality Ribbons** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	6%	9%	5%	9%	0%	6%	4%	0%
Somewhat important	32%	31%	41%	14%	25%	38%	28%	28%
Neither important nor unimportant	30%	24%	26%	18%	38%	32%	40%	38%
Somewhat unimportant	8%	11%	6%	14%	14%	6%	9%	3%
Not at all important	23%	24%	21%	45%	19%	18%	19%	28%

How important are **Trophies/Product Awards** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	7%	9%	9%	5%	6%	8%	4%	3%
Somewhat important	42%	37%	48%	36%	63%	44%	28%	48%
Neither important nor unimportant	29%	28%	24%	18%	25%	28%	49%	24%
Somewhat unimportant	6%	11%	3%	9%	6%	4%	9%	3%
Not at all important	15%	15%	15%	32%	0%	16%	11%	21%

How important are **Cash Prizes** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	10%	12%	15%	9%	13%	6%	6%	7%
Somewhat important	27%	27%	20%	14%	38%	28%	34%	24%
Neither important nor unimportant	40%	31%	48%	45%	31%	40%	40%	48%
Somewhat unimportant	5%	12%	2%	5%	6%	4%	4%	3%
Not at all important	18%	19%	15%	27%	13%	22%	13%	17%

How important is **The Chance to View Special Exhibitions** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	9%	15%	6%	9%	6%	6%	6%	3%
Somewhat important	42%	43%	32%	41%	50%	42%	45%	62%
Neither important nor unimportant	32%	33%	42%	18%	19%	30%	40%	17%
Somewhat unimportant	8%	5%	11%	14%	13%	10%	40%	7%
Not at all important	9%	4%	9%	18%	13%	12%	6%	10%

How important is **The Chance to View Higher Level Riders** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	31%	33%	32%	27%	19%	24%	30%	43%
Somewhat important	51%	55%	47%	50%	63%	50%	51%	54%
Neither important nor unimportant	14%	9%	18%	18%	19%	18%	15%	4%
Somewhat unimportant	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Not at all important	4%	3%	3%	5%	0%	6%	4%	0%



How important is having a **Clinic or Seminar held in conjunction with competition** to you when participating in a competition or event?

Response Option	Overall	Region						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely important	26%	28%	29%	32%	38%	24%	21%	21%
Somewhat important	50%	53%	47%	55%	25%	42%	64%	48%
Neither important nor unimportant	17%	19%	18%	9%	38%	20%	9%	21%
Somewhat unimportant	3%	0%	3%	0%	0%	4%	4%	7%
Not at all important	4%	0%	3%	5%	0%	10%	2%	3%

## Discussion of “What is important to you when participating in a competition or event?”

When looking at the results above, it is important to remember that these results only reflect the opinions of the members who responded to the survey and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the full membership of USAWE. It is also important to recognize that these priorities reflect our current membership as of October 2024 and not necessarily the membership we hope to attract. However, the information can help provide insights into possible priorities which may be helpful to committees, affiliate organizations, regional directors, show managers, and others as they consider upcoming shows and events.

Across all regions, it is notable to mention that the following appear to be some of the more important considerations when participating in a competition or event:

1. Camaraderie/Friendship
2. Travel Distance
3. Cost
4. The chance to view higher level riders
5. Clinic or seminar held in conjunction with competition

## Part III: Responses to Open-Ended Questions

In this survey, we asked open-ended questions to gain insight into the experiences of members. We are thankful for the long, detailed, and incredibly insightful responses received. In the following sections, we provide a summary of responses along with select comments for each of the questions. Comments have been lightly edited to fix spelling and grammar errors, but no substantive changes have been made to the content of the comments themselves. Please note that the select comments were chosen using the following criteria:

1. Comments that are nonidentifiable by others and do not name or identify specific people, places, or events.
2. Comments that reflect a broad range of experiences, positive and negative, where applicable
3. Comments from members in each USAWE region and with a variety of backgrounds/experiences

Please know that all comments are being sorted and routed, as appropriate, to the USAWE Board of Directors and Committees for additional analysis, research, and action, especially when there are repeated comments.

### Discussion – “What do you like about the WE activities you have participated in previously?”

The responses express a deep appreciation for the sport of Working Equitation, highlighting its blend of obstacles and dressage rooted in dressage principles. The participants enjoy the community's positivity and support, emphasizing the growth opportunities for both horse and rider. They value the friendly atmosphere at schooling shows, which build confidence in a less competitive setting, and appreciate the camaraderie and diversity of participants. They find joy in learning new skills, receiving constructive feedback, and the overall sense of inclusion within the community. Despite some frustrations with drama among organizations, the primary focus is on the fun, challenging experiences, and supportive relationships formed through the sport.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. The community is outstanding. Safety and Animal welfare are a priority. So many different types of equids, styles of riding, and tack/equipment are allowed (I have students competing in WE for no other reason than their horse's favorite bit is no longer USDF legal). The sport is more affordable than USDF dressage.
2. Well-run and well-organized, opportunity to meet others in WE, very nice facilities, an atmosphere of fun and camaraderie
3. The variety of things to work on! It's so rewarding. And the camaraderie! Love the support.
4. The community. The people and judges are all so friendly and nice.

5. Challenge of the sport & partnership of horses and rider, “skill based” rather than “best mover or highest jumper/fastest barrels etc. & last: Sportsmanship & friendly/ fun atmosphere of those who show.
6. Every event and activity is a measure of my relationship with my horse. This discipline attracts riders who all seem to want the best for their horses.
7. Learning the nuances of the sport. Friendly and helpful riders, coaches, TDs, and judges.
8. It’s so supportive no matter how good you are. There were very few stuck up noses at beginners who haven’t ever shown before.
9. The culture/community of horse people that are more inviting/friendly/real than any other organization/show groups I have been around. Also the fun, all around experience required, and variety (disciplines/breeds/backgrounds) offered for the horses and people. Any level rider/horse can benefit and have fun.
10. Collegiality, well-organized, detailed feedback

## Discussion – “How can the WE activities be improved?”

The text outlines various suggestions to improve Working Equestrian activities, focusing on community support, event accessibility, and rider education. Key points include:

1. Collaboration Among Organizations: Encourage affiliate organizations to support one another rather than compete.
2. Lower Competition Costs: Reduce expenses associated with competitions and offer more scholarships for riders on limited budgets. Some suggest replacing disqualifications with point deductions to promote learning.
3. Training and Clinics: Implement more local training opportunities, educational clinics before shows, and provide clearer guidance on judging criteria to help new riders prepare.
4. Judging Consistency: Advocate for more uniform scoring among judges and additional training for them to ensure fairness.
5. Inclusivity for Seniors: Propose a separate division for riders aged 60 and above and make the overall environment more welcoming for all levels.
6. Communication and Scheduling: Improve communication about show schedules and changes, ensuring better organization and flow during events.
7. Promote Participation: Foster a community atmosphere, encourage lower-level participation, and reduce barriers that prevent new riders from entering the sport.
8. Event Logistics: Suggest organizing shows on the same day to allow for concurrent phases, reducing the length of show days, and improving facilities’ safety and accessibility.

Overall, the text emphasizes the need for a more educational, inclusive, and supportive environment within the WE community to enhance participation and enjoyment for all riders.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. lower costs - the competitions are too expensive, relaxed rules for dress code, more focus on safety for obstacles
2. Improve the flow, 1) obstacles concurrent with dressage, 2) time limit on ease of handling - watched riders take 15 minutes per round in effort to get better score. Set an ideal time and then penalize for too fast or slow vs that time.
3. I think the shows in this area have been handled well. I think from a national level, more emphasis should be placed on the lower levels so they become a feeder to the upper level. One does not see many people ever advance past Novice A
4. Online educational classes - people will watch these rather than read a manual. There could be a library of videos, e.g., one for each obstacle, with visual demonstrations, tips, what the judge is looking for, etc. Could also be a library of Dressage movements from the tests, how best to ride them, what judges want to see, etc. Same for Speed and Cattle.
5. So far, I have had a very positive experience. I find the nit picky rule changing to be annoying. Decide on the rules and stick to them. The politics of the sport do not interest me at all, and take away from the fun of the sport
6. Need to keep pushing for more youth participation, it has improved but we need to keep up the good work.
7. Focus on education of lower-level riders and the majority of US riders, less focus on WAWE.
8. Please keep in consideration all breeds and disciplines. Most of us will NEVER be at level 7 but we are the solid base of the organization. Please let USAWE keep its diversity. It is what makes us great!
9. More dressage education
10. More consistent judging

### Discussion – “What first attracted you to Working Equitation?”

The responses highlight the reasons why people are drawn to Working Equitation. Key attractions include its foundation in dressage principles, the combination of dressage with obstacles, and the emphasis on horsemanship and partnership with horses. Many participants appreciate the community spirit, supportive atmosphere, and diversity of competition levels that WE offers. The sport is seen as a fun and engaging way to develop well-rounded horses through various challenges, including cattle work and ease of handling obstacles.

Additionally, individuals are excited by the versatility of WE, which accommodates any breed and riding style, making it inclusive and accessible. Many find it a refreshing change from

traditional dressage, offering a practical application of skills in a less rigid environment. Overall, the camaraderie among riders, the enjoyment of working with horses, and the variety of activities make WE an appealing choice for many participants.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Combining cattle work with judged classes that encourage healthy development of horses for longevity and partnership. And that the dressage/EOH expectations are more advanced than cowboy dressage which doesn't have the diversity in 4 (potential) phase competitions.
2. My first experience was at an international camp, and the camaraderie based around a spirit of openness and learning was incredible! 13 different countries were represented, and there was no haughtiness, or negative competitive attitudes.
3. I needed something to do with my ex-endurance horses. I liked the challenge
4. I was interested in the unique nature of the discipline where you can demonstrate your horse's talents in several different aspects to create a well-rounded partner. I also like that so far WE seems to emphasize horsemanship and partnership more so than other competitive disciplines.
5. The stimulation of playing with obstacles along with the precision of dressage.
6. The acceptance of all disciplines, how classical dressage is implemented into all stages, the challenge that makes me and my horse better partners, the camaraderie and friendliness of fellow participants, the variety and structure of moving through the levels, and it's so much FUN!
7. People being open and friendly and the horse/rider team priority
8. The culmination of training and partnership into a sport that displays the true value of a well-trained horse.
9. The diversity of the sport and inclusion of all breeds and disciplines
10. The individual scoring and the precision required, also the people—everyone is so welcoming

## Discussion – “How does Working Equitation compare to other equestrian disciplines you have experienced in the past?”

Working Equitation was compared to other equestrian disciplines, highlighting various experiences and opinions. Key themes include:

1. Community and Support: Many participants emphasize the supportive, welcoming atmosphere in WE, contrasting it with competitive and sometimes cutthroat environments in other disciplines like dressage and eventing. There's a sense of camaraderie among riders, with a focus on helping each other succeed.

2. Inclusivity: WE is seen as more inclusive, allowing various breeds and riding styles to compete. Riders appreciate the absence of snobbery and the ability for all types of horses to participate, making it appealing to a broader audience.
3. Variety and Fun: The multi-phase nature of WE—combining dressage, Ease of Handling, and speed—provides a more engaging experience. Participants find it more fun than traditional dressage or eventing, describing it as a better way to develop a well-rounded horse-rider partnership.
4. Development of Skills: Riders feel that WE requires a high level of horsemanship and promotes the bond between horse and rider. Many appreciate the practical applications of the skills learned in WE compared to other disciplines.
5. Concerns about Organization and Judging: Some riders express concerns about inconsistent judging and organizational challenges in WE shows. There are calls for improved clarity in rules and judging standards, as well as better management of show logistics to reduce long wait times.
6. Expensive but Rewarding: While shows can be costly, many riders believe that the experience and opportunities provided by WE are worth it. There's a desire for more affordable options and sponsorships to encourage participation.
7. Contrast with Other Disciplines: Riders often compare WE favorably to eventing and dressage, noting that WE tends to be less stressful and more enjoyable. They appreciate that it prioritizes the horse's welfare and enjoyment, in contrast to some traditional competitive environments.

Overall, participants in WE appreciate its unique blend of challenge, community, and inclusivity, expressing hope for the sport's continued growth while maintaining its supportive spirit.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. I am used to much more saddle time. The shows are expensive to travel to for a few minutes of riding time.
2. It's way more inclusive for any type of riding and any equine
3. It seems that most riders are coming for the horse not the competition, meaning most are putting their horses first and that makes a wonderful supportive community
4. The majority of the people/competitors/judges are supportive
5. Since WE is newer, I feel like everyone is more open to learning and there is less pressure and competitive atmosphere among fellow riders. I like that WE requires good horsemanship, and I think that it offers more opportunities to compete given the different phases all in one show.
6. Again, the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of the shows and clinics, as well as the focus on good horsemanship drew me to WE. Other disciplines were often rigorous and

competitive without inspiring good sportsmanship and real horsemanship, and newcomers/beginners/unusual breeds were not often encouraged by fellow competitors and judges.

7. Very competitive, but much more welcoming to beginners and the lower levels
8. Honestly, the most fun I've had at any show. The other competitors are encouraging and helpful. Everyone cheers on everyone! It's a blast to hang out with such positive people.
9. You become part of a big family. They are always there for you.
10. The organization as a whole is Not as organized, the events are more expensive, and the awards program is not nearly as nice (prizes, ribbons...)

### Discussion – “If you have competed, how do you feel about the interactions you have had with the USAWE show management teams and licensed officials (show managers, show volunteers, judges and technical delegates)?”

The responses reflect a variety of experiences related to rated shows, primarily highlighting interactions with judges, technical delegates (TDs), and show management. Most feedback is overwhelmingly positive, emphasizing the friendly, supportive, and professional nature of staff and volunteers. Many participants appreciate the encouragement they receive, noting that positive interactions enhance their overall experience in the sport.

However, there are also mentions of inconsistencies in judging and some unfriendly or biased judges that can create negative experiences. Specific concerns include favoritism, lack of communication, and some judges being intimidating or condescending. While many express appreciation for the dedication of show officials and volunteers, a few highlighted issues with specific judges and the need for better organization and clarity at events.

Overall, the general sentiment is that while there are occasional negative experiences, the majority of interactions in the community are positive and supportive, contributing to a welcoming atmosphere for competitors.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Usually very organized and very willing to fix things when mistakes are made
2. I think they are all very helpful, responsive and dedicated to improving our sport and sharing their knowledge and time
3. 95% of the time, the interactions with show staff have been great!
4. Some are out of touch with people who aren't trying to be perfect or go to higher levels
5. In general, everyone has been great! I do feel that the sport is going to be bottle-necked with the number of judges available. There cannot be more shows until there are more judges available. The same with TDs though not to the same extent.
6. Everyone is always so friendly and helpful. I love being able to interact with judges at shows, I always enjoy getting to know them a little better.

7. Generally, my interactions with judges have been excellent. I have met some particular judges that tend to be completely negative without being constructive, but these have been the exception, not the rule. All other show staff interactions I have had tend to be very positive.
8. I have had overwhelmingly positive interactions with USAWE show management and LOs
9. I have had very positive interactions and everyone has been helpful and seems to want to see the riders succeed in this discipline and do right by their horses.
10. Excellent! I have found officials to be open, kind, and generous with knowledge.

### Discussion – “What do you think or feel about the progression and requirements of the levels? Please share your feedback from the perspective of horse training or rider training”

The text discusses the feedback on the progression and requirements of the levels in Working Equestrian competition from the perspectives of both horse and rider training. Key points include:

1. **Resource Availability:** There is a noted lack of resources for upper-level riders, particularly for levels 4 and above. Many riders emphasize the importance of having clear objectives and training plans to facilitate progress.
2. **Difficulty of Progression:** Riders express concerns about the significant jumps in difficulty between certain levels—particularly between Level 1 and Level 2, and between Level 4 and Level 5. Several suggest the introduction of intermediate levels to ease this transition.
3. **Flexible Training and Assessment:** Feedback indicates that the current structure allows riders to advance based on their horse’s readiness and personal ability. However, many feel that DQs (disqualifications) at lower levels are discouraging and suggest implementing point deductions instead.
4. **Emphasis on Fundamentals:** Some riders highlight the need for more emphasis on foundational skills and proper training techniques, such as encouraging canter transitions and ensuring that horses are not overly stressed during transitions.
5. **Judging Criteria:** There are also calls for clearer judging criteria and guidance on what is expected at each level to avoid confusion and to better support riders progressing in their skills.
6. **Inclusivity for Older Riders:** Riders emphasize the need for inclusivity, especially for older participants or those with less competitive horses. Many express the desire for



levels that accommodate various abilities and encourage enjoyment over strict competition.

7. **Suggestions for Improvement:** Recommendations include allowing optional cantering in lower levels, introducing more test variations, and providing additional educational resources for both riders and judges to align expectations.

Overall, most riders view the progression as reasonable, yet they advocate for adjustments to make the sport more accessible, enjoyable, and supportive of each rider's unique journey.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. The progression is an advantage for the horse. I'd like to see the riders have to advance after winning 3 blue ribbons to make room for riders. Or allow the rider to continue in the same class for years, if they must, but as schooling.
2. Mostly I think the levels are well created. However, I do not like that there is a jump in intro, but riders are not allowed to canter on the departure. By discouraging a horse to jump or land in canter, it is not setting them up well for their future in jumping. I also think there is a bit of a leap to go to novice a where it already introduces canter in the dressage pattern, but also introduces that awkward turn on the forehand on a rail. I think that maneuver would be much better on a diagonal line or put into a novice b pattern. Most novice a riders seem to struggle with that movement, and I think it's setting up horses and riders to learn it poorly.
3. Should be some freedom to move a horse back down level. Example would be an older horse no longer able to sustain competing at higher level.
4. That is one of the best parts of WE. As my competitive years are in my past, and need for a challenging activity that allows staying at a level until you are ready to move on is great. And, the challenge it allows to move up when ready is something to look forward to and strive for.
5. I think that the WAVE rules should only apply above Level 4. Let the lower levels have looser rules that make the progression more appropriate for young horses coming up. For example, in Level 2 where there are many trot canter trot transitions, allow for more space between obstacles and a bending line. Hard for young horses to transition on a straight line. Changing the rule book so frequently is difficult for people to retain with all the many things that they have to remember already!
6. The progression makes sense, but I do think that some people do not always understand what the expectations of the levels truly mean. For example, just because they can do the specified transitions (trot canter, walk canter) they don't understand the expectations of the quality in regards to, say, balance and engagement.
7. Getting from level 1 to level 2 is a big leap

8. I do feel that having more than 1 dressage test per level might help with progression. Not saying we need 3 (like traditional) or 4 (like Western), but at least 2 would allow to introduce some more elements.
9. Skill level requirements between L4 and L5 is huge. Not sure how to fix that from a show management perspective. More schooling, training, learning opportunities at this level would be helpful
10. I think we need to do like Dressage with USDF and FEI - so that once you hit a certain level you are held to WAVE standards. This will help grow the pipeline of riders and horses while ensuring they are prepared for international competition. Maybe at L4 or L5 is where WAVE comes into play so they have two levels of following those rules before going international.

### **Membership Results:**

#### **Discussion – “What do you enjoy most about being a member of USAWE?”**

Members of USAWE appreciate various aspects of their involvement in the organization. They enjoy the sport itself, the challenges it presents, and the opportunity to grow with their horses. Many highlight the strong sense of community, supportive atmosphere, and friendships formed through shared experiences at shows and events. Members value educational resources, access to competitions, and the camaraderie among riders, which fosters an encouraging environment. Some express concerns about the organization’s growth and consistency, but overall, the enthusiasm for participating in a developing sport and the positive interactions with like-minded individuals are recurring themes.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Finding ways to grow with my horse. And, of course, the people.
2. I love that it’s different from regular dressage; there are advantages to the incurable training that you only find in trail classes; you rarely find a horse in a trail class that is also cross training in dressage, however. It combines keeping their mind limber and gymnastic and doing the same for their body!
3. Competing with my equine partner in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Having WE friends to cheer on and share our journeys with.
4. I enjoy that I know so many members personally. Locally and nationally!!
5. My education and skill as a rider has grown in leaps and bounds. I am accomplishing more than I ever dreamed possible. I have learned more in the past eight years than I ever learned in the past 30 years. I love the type of people it attracts and the horsemanship it expects.
6. Best friends have come from WE- camaraderie and challenges for my horse and myself
7. The fellowship. I love the people involved in this sport

8. The camaraderie and the ability to have a safe encouraging environment to push myself and my horse out of our comfort zone and accomplish goals I didn't even know we had!
9. Knowing knowledgeable clinicians and judges that are willing to share this knowledge. Awards—like medals—adds to personal growth within the sport.
10. Helping to grow the sport and awareness as I think it is so great, I want to share with others

## Discussion – “What could USAWE do to improve your membership experience, participation, and overall satisfaction?”

The feedback from members regarding their experience with USAWE highlights several areas for improvement:

**Community and Camaraderie:** Members express a desire for better collaboration and support between local Affiliate Organizations (AOs) to foster a sense of community. There are concerns about cliques forming that create division rather than camaraderie.

**Member Connection:** Many members feel disconnected from the organization as a whole, despite strong local relationships. Suggestions include providing welcome gifts to new members and enhancing communication about events and updates.

**Affordability and Accessibility:** Cost is a recurring concern, with calls for more affordable shows, entry fees, and educational resources. Members want greater access to events without excessive travel.

**Rule Simplification:** The complexity and frequent changes in rules frustrate members. There is a strong desire for clearer, more consistent rules and less bureaucracy.

**Educational Opportunities:** Members request more educational resources, including online training, clinics, and clearer guidelines on judging criteria. They want learning opportunities that cater to all skill levels, especially lower levels.

**Judging and Awards:** Concerns about biased judging and the fairness of awards distribution were noted. Members advocate for a more equitable recognition system that acknowledges efforts across all levels.

**Event Scheduling and Communication:** Many members find the current calendar system challenging and desire better organization of events. Improved communication about opportunities and show updates is essential.

**Support for AOs:** There is a call for more support for AOs, which are critical for organizing local events. Members feel that strengthening AOs could enhance overall membership growth and event availability.

Overall, members are looking for a more inclusive, supportive, and transparent organization that prioritizes the needs and experiences of all members, especially those at lower levels.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. I think ongoing outreach to members and not allowing the leadership to distance themselves from the members as it grows.
2. Listen to all members needs and not just upper-level riders
3. Offer learning opportunities for every level – don't forget that the riders at the L1 - L3 levels are the base of the organization and make up the bulk of the membership. Fielding an international team is a consideration but should not be the main focus of the association.
4. All of us need to grow the sport so there will be more younger people involved
5. Offering more education, especially online, would be wonderful. Not everyone has access to clinics or experienced instructors. I would love to see videos of how certain obstacles are performed correctly, what judges are looking for at each level, training tips, etc. Also the same for the different elements of the dressage tests. I feel this would help people prepare as they move up to the next level.
6. Keep grassroots local efforts in mind. I know one goal is to develop an international team. But let's not lose sight of the benefit of supporting less competitive new people
7. A non-riding membership for officials, such as secretaries, scorers, show organizers, etc.
8. Better communication -- news letters are OK, but sometimes specific topics need their own thread or letter or email.
9. You could simplify the rules, they are too voluminous and arbitrary. Participants should be focused on their horse and their riding, not the nit picky requirements.
10. Offer free/low cost educational opportunities (especially for L1-L4), better membership outreach, better organization of USAWE events, greater transparency of board operations

## Discussion – “What could USAWE do to make membership more attractive to others?”

To make USAWE membership more attractive, suggestions include:

**Reduce Costs:** Lower show fees and offer more affordable clinics and local events to minimize travel and participation expenses.

**Increase Opportunities:** Provide more local shows, schooling events, and youth clinics to encourage participation at various levels, especially for beginners.

**Education and Simplification:** Simplify the rules, enhance educational resources, and create clearer communication about the sport. Online resources and instructional videos could help newcomers.

Marketing and Outreach: Implement a stronger marketing strategy to raise awareness of the sport, targeting both traditional dressage and Western riders. Use social media to share member stories and showcase diverse breeds.

Engagement and Community Building: Foster community through state-wide organizations, banquets, and outreach programs. Encourage participation in exhibitions and partnerships with other equestrian organizations.

Awards and Recognition: Expand prize offerings and recognition programs to motivate members, particularly for lower-level riders.

Diversity and Inclusion: Highlight the sport's inclusivity by showcasing various breeds and riding styles, making it approachable for all equestrians.

Overall, a combination of cost reduction, educational resources, community building, and effective marketing could help attract more members to USAWE.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Greater support for the AOs; including start-up funds, increased how-tos for everything from building obstacles to running licensed shows.
2. I believe it lies in developing and promoting the youth. We must develop a program that attracts young riders. Sending a team to the World Championships will help, but there needs to be more education and marketing about WE overall.
3. Fees are already low so just provide more educational opportunities.
4. Continue with exhibitions at other major shows
5. I think the buddy programs where if you bring a friend you both get reduced rates for showing.
6. Figure out a way to work on the perception of priorities between international/high level riders and the base of membership (L1/L2 riders).
7. Offer an authoritative, member only video and training library and resources.
8. Education of the process and rules. People wanting to start, but not given a good example of what WE is, I've seen shy away from it.
9. Possibly co-sponsor with 4-H or point club or other registered horse associations like AQHA, APHA, etc.
10. Encourage state-wide organizations where all AOs must work together as one to promote the sport through shows, clinics, bootcamps; and distribute awards, prizes, etc. through banquets.

## Discussion – “If you know people who have left USAWE, can you help us understand why?”

The responses reflect some dissatisfaction among members of a specific Affiliate Organization, particularly regarding conflicts and drama stemming from the formation of a rival group that has created a divisive atmosphere. Some people reported feeling a lack of camaraderie and expressed frustration over high show fees, travel costs, and perceived favoritism among judges. Some felt that the rules were overly complex and not welcoming to newcomers, leading to disqualifications that discouraged participation. There were also mentions of political issues within the organization, which contributed to a perception of exclusivity and a lack of support for lower-level competitors. Overall, the sentiment reflects a desire for more unity, clearer communication, and support for all members, especially those new to the sport.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Expensive show fees and long distance travel to rated shows!
2. I do know of some people who have left. They felt that the rules were at times overly difficult, arbitrary and not welcoming to newcomers.
3. Costs, people getting DQ'd in their first show. I have seen people DQ'd for a tack violation in their first show because they did not read the rule book. The tack they had was perfectly acceptable in the discipline they usually rode. We should not assume new people read the rule book. We should have done better by them as an organization.
4. Cost of shows, risk of DQ, difficulty understanding rules
5. Too much drama and lack of transparency from the board. Lack of local instructors/education and/or show opportunities
6. DQ's when just starting the sport, there are so many rules and it is overwhelming to an L1 rider. Why can't we make a rule they get a 0 on the obstacle but they are not DQ'd at L1?
7. There are SO MANY WAYS TO GET ELIMINATED and they change all the time (even in the same year) making it very complicated to stay up to speed on current rules. People don't want to pay a lot of \$\$\$ to get eliminated.
8. A strong perception of prioritization toward upper levels and a push toward WAVE.
9. Probably not enough participation in their areas
10. Because the judging changed at the lower levels and people feel like they can't improve. You say all breeds are welcome, but some judges are very breed biased.

## Discussion – “Why do you think people are attracted to Working Equitation in the U.S.? (What have you heard from others?)”

People are attracted to Working Equitation in the U.S. for several reasons:

**Inclusivity:** WE welcomes riders of all disciplines (Western, English, etc.) and allows any breed of horse, creating a diverse and friendly community.

**Fun and Variety:** The combination of dressage principles and obstacles offers a unique and enjoyable challenge. Many find it more exciting than traditional dressage.

**Supportive Atmosphere:** The camaraderie among participants fosters a positive environment where everyone encourages each other, making it less intimidating for newcomers.

**Accessibility:** Riders can use their own horses and tack without strict requirements, making it affordable and approachable for many.

**Skill Development:** WE emphasizes good horsemanship and provides opportunities for riders to improve their skills while enjoying the process.

**Less Pressure:** Compared to other competitive disciplines, WE is perceived as less stressful, allowing for a more relaxed showing experience.

Overall, the appeal lies in its fun, inclusive nature and the chance for riders to engage in a rewarding and varied equestrian experience.

Here are some select responses from this question:

1. Its diversity of competitors, variety of venues, beneficial training for riders and their equine partners.
2. Its inclusive, save, fun, challenging, you get a lot of showing for your entrance fee, a lot of people use it to follow their personal journey to better horsemanship and get inspired
3. They appreciate the challenge and enjoy the company of fellow riders. The atmosphere is not as intense as seen in other disciplines.
4. Friendly people, don't need fancy horses, diverse horses, grounded in dressage but more fun.
5. Cross-training seems to be #1 reason. I've encouraged others that are doing eventing or dressage to come try it out, and they are normally hooked after their first experience!
6. They can ride what they have and be successful. The emphasis is on assisting the horse and rider to progress. Western riders can compete because the emphasis is on horses doing a job, not just moving a certain way.
7. They say it is fun and the people are helpful and supportive
8. Because it's fun, inexpensive and allows for inclusion of the dressage training of the horse along with the obstacles.
9. The community - my friends all comment when I share the extracurricular activities from shows that they love the effort for camaraderie. Also, baby boomers reaching an age where they don't want to event/jump anymore or who have been doing dressage for years and are excited by something new.
10. Practical application of dressage and ranch skills. All breeds can do well, most expensive horse is not required.

## Discussion – “ Any other insights you would like to share with us?”

The feedback reflects a strong commitment to Working Equitation in the U.S., emphasizing the need to maintain the sport’s integrity and inclusivity as it grows. Many participants appreciate the diversity of riders and horses involved and express a desire for more support for lower-level competitors.

Key themes include:

**Preserving Tradition:** Participants urge against diluting the sport’s foundations in dressage principles and maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers.

**Community Support:** There’s a call for clearer communication, transparency, and efforts to resolve internal conflicts within the organization to foster a sense of community.

**Rule Simplification:** Many feel that simplifying rules and ensuring consistency in judging would enhance the experience, especially for beginners and lower-level riders.

**Expanded Opportunities:** Suggestions for more clinics, virtual communities, and increased accessibility to shows reflect a desire to grow the sport and support riders at all levels.

**Focus on Inclusivity:** Feedback emphasizes the importance of not solely catering to upper-level competitors but also recognizing the needs of the majority of members who compete at lower levels for fun and learning.

Overall, the respondents value the spirit of WE and hope for continued growth while prioritizing the needs of all participants.

### **Here are some select responses from this question:**

1. Thank you for such an amazing organization, up to date website and so many easy to find links on website. IE- RULES, DRESSAGE TESTS...etc. LOVE Your website!
2. Our sport is in its infantile stage, let’s keep it pure, recognizable to WAVE, not watered down to just attract members. Let’s attract our members with strong leadership that is united. We need to attract more men to this sport showing that it is truly a sport whet men and women can compete as equal.
3. I feel that the BOD turnover (term cycle) is too short. I think that having basically 1/2 of the BOD changing yearly is too disruptive. Maybe, split the Regional directors up into 3 cycles groups. instead of 2. So that it is not such a flip every year. I think having a new president every year is also hard. Maybe extend to 2 yrs.
4. I think the sport is awesome. I think USAWE jumped into WAVE way too soon. Why not work out all the kinks and get the organization in tip top shape. 90% of your members have no desire to show at the upper levels. Most of us are adult amateur riders that just want to have fun and learn with our horses and friends.



5. Overall, I think USAWE does a good job, I just think we need to work on both ends of the membership. We need to build up the mid level and upper level riders, while making it more inviting for the beginners.
6. Please add more options to the store! I would love to sport more WE apparel.
7. Thank you to all the volunteers. You all do so much! Please don't try to become part of USEF.
8. Keep up the good work but be willing to compromise for the good of the community
9. Rule simplification, judging consistency and make the whole experience more welcoming to new participants.
10. I would like to learn more about which advanced riders can help train or teach either in person or online young up and coming horses. How can we teach the WE mindset to young horses from the ground?

## Part IV: Recommendations and Next Steps

**Strategic Planning:** The strategic planning team is using the survey results to better organize the strategic plan draft and help prioritize goals for the coming years. We will be using the feedback of members to determine how and where to focus the Board of Directors and various committees. Communication and opportunities for feedback throughout the organization will be planned and implemented.

**Presentation of Results:** This report will be presented to the Board of Directors, committees and the general membership. In addition, the strategic planning team will route additional data and specific feedback to appropriate committees for action.

**Survey Frequency:** The team recommends that we repeat this survey process on a three-year cycle to obtain updated information. As a result of a new membership database being implemented, we may be able to use a different mechanism for conducting the survey which is to be determined.

### **Conclusion**

This survey and the feedback gathered provides USAWE leadership with incredible insight into the experiences of our members. We are delighted to share that some of the concerns of members are already being addressed, and some will have been addressed when this report is published. While we won't be able to address every concern shared, we are committed to evaluating each of the common themes. Our members are important to us, and we encourage members to continue to communicate regularly with the USAWE Board of Directors.

The current Board of Directors and their contact information can be found online at <https://usawe.org/corporate/board-of-directors/>.