

3 Keys To Successful Chapter Membership Renewal



Associations and their chapters continue to face stagnating or declining membership. We've heard this from our clients, and the data backs it up.



Twenty six percent of associations are experiencing a decline in membership growth, according to the 2025 Marketing General's (MGI) Membership Marketing Benchmarking Survey. In the tenth year of the survey, their data also showed a leveling of associations reporting growth—45%, down from 47% in 2024 and 49% in 2023.

The top reasons respondents gave for the decline include:

- Lack of engagement/not using the benefits the association offers
- No dues assistance from employer
- Lack of value
- Forgot to renew.

Membership renewal is crucial to a chapter's success. Renewals provide revenue of course, which helps you deliver what members come to you for. But more importantly, long-term chapter membership strengthens your chapter community, as members engage, grow and evolve together. It's a continuous cycle, as that sense of community plays a role in members' decisions to continue their membership in your chapter.



Chapters with successful membership renewal outcomes have a few things in common. Read on, to learn some of the renewal secrets they shared in the survey.

Key 1: Clearly define and communicate member value to the right audiences

Only 11% of survey respondents believe their association offers a very compelling value proposition, which is a drop from 13% in the previous two surveys. Are you clear on what members get from your chapter? If you're not, you're not alone; many associations have difficulty pinpointing and effectively messaging their value.

Chapters that successfully entice members to stay are crystal clear in their messaging and targeted with their delivery. They don't rush to just get something out, nor do they send the same message to their entire membership.

These organizations have a process, which starts with identifying the different values members take from the chapter. Through focus groups, surveys, question cards, one-on-one conversations, etc. they learn why people joined and why they attend their chapter networking events, conferences, trainings and more.

Next they dig deep into their chapter data to understand how their different demographics appreciate and take advantage of these benefits. Or don't take advantage of them. They get to these details by analyzing membership data by segment. Maybe they learn that their younger, newer-in-their-careers members attend chapter networking and mentorship events looking for new jobs and mentors, but mid-career members attend those same events wanting to brainstorm solutions to problems and to fill job openings.

Only they understand the differences do these chapters create messaging unique to each group around the value of these benefits, reframing their benefits into "what's in it for me" (WIIFM) language. Instead of simply listing the benefits, they create content and stories that explore the benefits and engage a specific group, like how members have advanced their careers through their mentorship program, the fulfillment they experience from giving back through that mentorship program or how they enjoy building a like-minded community through chapter-organized networking, brainstorming, etc.



Associations that reported membership renewal rates of 80% or more in the survey were significantly more likely to use this type of “what’s in it for me?” messaging.

Integrating specific WIIFM messaging, segmented by audience, into your renewal campaigns, in your onboarding and in your year-round communications lets members clearly understand the benefits as they apply to them specifically, not generalized to the entire chapter.

Key 2: Innovate to stay relevant to members

Twenty-three percent of respondents consider their association to be extremely or very innovative. And AI continues to be one of the most prominent drivers of chapter innovation, with 18% utilizing the technology, up from 11% in 2024. These organizations continue to innovate in their membership marketing, using digital marketing channels like LinkedIn and Facebook paid advertising, search engine marketing and even retargeting (sending follow-ups to those who started something and then didn’t follow through, like registering for an event and not attending or visiting a webpage about volunteering and not signing up for your volunteer program.)

Innovative associations are staying on top of what their members want and updating their offerings as they can, to reflect both member needs and the needs of their industry.

Not sure what to try? Consider a pilot program with a small group. Maybe you’ve heard whispers that some new members don’t feel connected to the chapter. It could be time for a formal member onboarding program to introduce them to all the great things you do and all the people that make your chapter run smoothly, while also sharing all the ways they can get involved. If that’s too much to take on at once, try scheduling events geared toward new members, to answer questions and introduce them to key chapter members.

Key 3: Offer strategic incentives

According to the survey, associations with renewal rates of at least 80% are significantly more likely to offer additional months free as a recruitment method. And associations with any overall increase in renewals are significantly more likely to offer some sort of incentive, like discounts, coupons or vouchers for events, free gifts or other premiums compared with those reporting drops or no change in renewals.



Incentives are great for reinforcing the value members perceive they're getting from your chapter by giving them something tangible in exchange for that loyalty. They're also great for getting people over the renewing "hump." Something as simple as free chapter swag, like a sweatshirt, or discounted admission to your conference or gala, might be what they need to feel valued and appreciated.

Try some time-limited renewal incentives, like early bird discounts or a free month of membership. Or try bundling membership renewal with other high-value offerings, like VIP admission to a speaker event or a referral bonus when they bring in a new member.

Chapter membership renewals—not a lost cause

As you can see, while many associations struggle with stagnant or falling renewal rates, with a few changes, the trajectory of your membership can change for the better.

What's the state of your current membership renewal strategy? There are probably some easy shifts, innovations and upgrades you can make for a stronger, more sustainable chapter renewal program and happier members.

