

5 Ways Association Chapters Can Make An Impact Around Thanksgiving



Association chapters are always looking for new ways to bring together members, outside of the traditional events like wine and cheese networking, professional development sessions and panel discussions. Those events are effective, of course, but, as we've talked about before, it's important to remember that your members and other audiences have interests outside of networking and education.



Plus, since members tend to have even less availability at this time of year, they often have to choose between an event your chapter is holding and doing something else with family and friends. For many, that something else is giving back, using their time, resources and talents for causes they care about. Have you thought of combining their interests and the chapter's and holding chapter service events? These types of events give your chapter the chance to bring together people for an event focused on teamwork and compassion while also providing time to network and learn, in a setting that isn't focused on "What do you do?" and "How can I help you?"

As you plan your chapter events for this fall, think about the service events your membership might be interested in, since there's a good chance they'll already be looking for ways to give back to their communities around Thanksgiving.

5 service events association chapters can hold around Thanksgiving

- 1. A turkey drive.** Members can use the skills many of them have developed in their work lives to organize the drive, set a goal, promote it to members and coordinate activities like drop-off locations and distributions. If running an entire turkey drive is too much for your chapter on its own, consider partnering with another nonprofit, school, business or community center to work together and share the different responsibilities.
- 2. A canned food drive.** Many people in your community need food for longer than just the holiday. Set up a drive to collect non-perishable foods like canned vegetables, soups, beans, rice etc. Post a list of the items you want to collect, to make it easier for people to purchase. Your chapter can work together to set the goals, host the drive at an event and promote what you're doing on social media. Boost participation by partnering with local businesses — consider asking existing and potential sponsors and even vendors — to use as collection sites.
- 3. Volunteering at a food bank or soup kitchen.** Around Thanksgiving, these facilities experience a surge in demand, and they need extra volunteers to keep everything going. Ask members for location ideas and coordinate a shift or multiple shifts with one organization or several different ones. Encourage members to sign up early and share with them what they can expect from the event, like the tasks they'll complete — sorting donations, serving hot meals etc. — and who they might be interacting with and talking to.
- 4. A Little Free Pantry.** Little Free Pantries are small, often community-built and maintained, easily accessible storage cabinets where neighbors leave food and essential items for others to take when they need it. Have your chapter adopt a pantry and keep it stocked with non-perishable foods, hygiene products and small seasonal treats. To get started, use an online map or local resource list to find pantries nearby. Don't see one in your area? Consider starting your own, keeping in mind these are typically operational year-round, so you'd need a plan to keep it operating after the holidays.
- 5. Donations to a shelter or charity.** You may find that, even when you offer in-person service events, there are some chapter members too busy to meet in person but who still want to help. Offering ways for members to help financially can be just as impactful for some as hands-on volunteering. Identify nonprofits, like food banks, shelters, community organizations, etc., that



need extra resources during the holidays. Encourage members, at meetings, in newsletters, on your social media, etc., to give what they can, individually or through a chapter collection in a single donation.

Getting started with your chapter's Thanksgiving service event

Thanksgiving will be here before you know it, so don't wait. To ensure that one person isn't responsible for planning an entire event, ask for volunteers to form a committee. This committee can generate multiple ideas and share them with your membership to see what resonates and how they want to get involved. You may find that you have enough interested people for more than one chapter service activity.

Challenge your members to get involved and invite them to share their experiences on social media. You might even create a chapter hashtag to track and celebrate the event, like #CHAPTERNAMETHanksgivingGiveBack2025.

Giving back in any form strengthens your community, the one you live in and the one you're part of, which in this case is your chapter. Whether you choose to organize a chapter-wide service project or encourage members to do something on their own or with their families, those members will thank you for the chapter's involvement and for the chance to get involved. They'll also be extremely happy they don't have to make a choice between your chapter and their other obligations.



