

5 Ways Small Chapters Can Get More People To Join Their Board



Strong association chapter boards are essential to nearly every aspect of chapter success, from growth to member engagement and long-term sustainability. And we know how difficult it can be to bring on board members who are the right fit, interested in the role and willing to take on all that comes with it, the good and the bad.



What should chapters, especially smaller ones, be thinking about and doing, to get the right people on the board and keep them there?

Qualified chapter board recruitment is hard at any size

Board roles are significant commitments. Board members often squeeze in their board responsibilities at night, on the weekends and on their lunch hour, if they can take one. They're often asked to take on tasks that might not be in their wheelhouse, like marketers asked to look at profit and loss statements and finance members reviewing membership data. Many board members don't clearly grasp the full scope of their responsibilities until they're in the job. By the time that happens, it is often too late. It's not a surprise for chapters to see overwhelmed board members burning out, decreasing their participation in chapter business and even quietly resigning.

It's even harder for small chapters

Small chapter boards have the same constraints as larger ones. They attempt to manage their shortfalls with a fraction of the people larger chapters have access to. Typically, these chapters lack the time or budget for board development or onboarding, which often feels like extra work, though these kinds of activities can be critical to chapter survival. Fewer events and touchpoints between boards and members means that these boards lack a solid board member pipeline, which means potential board members often go unnoticed. As a result, when a small chapter loses even one board member, there's an immediate gap that lasts longer than it needs to.

5 ways smaller chapters can engage potential board members

Here are five things smaller chapters can do to make it easier for their members to understand expectations and step more effectively into board roles. (Larger chapters should keep these in mind too.)

1. **Increase the visibility of board roles.** Treat your board roles like jobs, so your general chapter membership can clearly see what it means to have a seat on your board. Create a dedicated volunteer leadership opportunities page on your chapter website. Include job descriptions with responsibilities, typical time commitments, benefits and application deadlines. Promote board positions well before you need to fill them, through your chapter newsletters, social media and chapter events. Show people how the board operates, with term lengths and meeting schedules. Consider recording board meetings so members can see you in action. And don't forget to provide a contact for questions.
2. **Highlight the "insider" benefits of a role on your board.** Share what a board role can offer, outside of the direct impact on the chapter. Interview current and previous board members to illustrate how board roles can provide leadership development and resume-building experience, professional networking opportunities, increased visibility in your industry and the chance to impact your profession. These opportunities are ones that your general membership may not have access to or at least not to the same extent.
3. **Consider providing incentives.** We're not suggesting you pay members to join the board. There are plenty of incentives your chapter can offer that don't require money. Complimentary or discounted membership, event registrations and professional development for board members



can go a long way. For some members, seeing board members thanked publicly could be all the incentive they need. Let general members see how you appreciate your board members, when you recognize them through awards and spotlights and in member communications.

4. Build a volunteer pipeline. Having a single board member who holds multiple positions isn't sustainable for the long term. To build a pipeline of volunteers ready to join your board, create visible steppingstones to board service; an example would be a person moving from a member of your sponsorship committee to chair of that committee and then to the board as VP of sponsorship. Encourage current board members to mentor general members they believe could be a good fit on the board and ask them to invite these members to consider leadership roles.

5. Create a culture of participation. Make it obvious your board is one your members should want to join and spend their time engaging with. Regularly show all the positive things the board gets done to help the chapter succeed. Highlight the need for volunteers in those areas, as well as other areas you'd like to expand but don't have sufficient volunteers for, like finding sponsors for your website and creating a plan to improve member engagement. Share stories from current and past board members on your website, in social media and in chapter meetings. Include their board responsibilities and why they joined the board. Perhaps most importantly, show how volunteering on your chapter board is easy for busy professionals, by highlighting opportunities that fit their schedules, like micro volunteering and smaller task-focused roles. You might even think about offering job sharing, when you have two people sharing one board role.

Building viable chapter boards for the long term

Small chapters don't have to settle for a smaller board as an accepted cost of their size. Actively marketing your board opportunities, offering incentives that make the role more appealing and intentionally developing future leaders before you need them up are some of the ways chapters can turn what they perceive as a shortage into a stream of qualified board candidates. This approach will help you keep your chapter strong and move forward.

