

Boost Young Professional Chapter Engagement Through High-Impact Events



We've talked about the importance of engaging appropriately with the different decades that make up your association chapter membership. And we've discussed how these different chapter demographics — college, career newbies, experienced, high school, college, different generations, including X, Y, Z, etc. — have different expectations for membership. Some join for education and networking, others want mentorship, and yet others join your chapter for the chance to advocate for their industry and their careers.



We've also shared that of those demographics, the number of Gen Y members, AKA the millennials, in most chapters continues to increase, especially as members age, retire, and leave the chapter. Knowing that it's important to keep members' needs at the forefront of your planning, what changes have you made to your programming, if any, to better attract and keep this group?

If you haven't, it's not too late.

Millennials, born between (approximately) 1980 and 2000, may not be happy attending the standard events you've been holding, like your speaker series, panel discussions, and wine and cheese networking. They want more from the events they choose to attend, and they are more likely to attend those that are interactive and include opportunities for real connection, and they often look for events that include some sort of experience, like a workshop, cooking, or mixology class or even a plant or kitchen tour.

Don't stress, thinking you need to completely overhaul every aspect of your events. It's more likely that you need to change things up a bit to better engage millennials, balancing some of the more traditional aspects with the sorts of activities that resonate better with them.

Here are a few ways to update your events to make them more attractive to millennials. Interestingly, some of these changes can improve engagement for all your chapter members, so don't feel like you'll be turning off your more seasoned members.

Include the chance for interaction.

Millennials don't enjoy events where they sit listening to people talk or stand with a glass of wine waiting to be found. They prefer events that give them the chance to be active participants. Consider ways to involve them in the event activity, like an easy hike or walk with a guide pointing out mushrooms they can eat as well as those they should avoid, or a presentation by a laboratory glass supplier for a chapter of scientists with samples they can touch. Or hold an interactive panel, like a moderated debate with audience participation using live polling, panelist-to-panelist conversations, and a chance for audience members to join the panel, instead of a series of prepared speeches with time for questions tacked on at the end. Power up your networking with small group games or activities like "Two Truths and a Lie," "Human Bingo," packing sandwiches for a homeless shelter, or painting the walls of a day-care.

Design shareable moments.

Many millennials will jump at the chance to share their experiences on social media. To get their attention, build visually engaging elements into the event that make them stop and pull out their phones, like photo installations, branded chapter backdrops, unique décor, immersive environments and interactive displays. Think about things like neon signs, balloon installations, flower walls, an archway entry or even a quiet "library corner." These types of "Instagrammable moments" can help millennials better connect to the event and your chapter while extending the reach of your event by providing organic social media opportunities that provide additional chapter exposure. The best photo moments have a clear frame (so people know where to stand), good lighting and something that feels specific to your event. Adding a custom element — your chapter name, an inside joke, your city, etc. — makes people want to stop, photograph and share.



Ensure the event has a clear purpose and is values focused.

Millennials respond more strongly to experiences that are driven by a mission. Whether you hold events that focus on the mission of your chapter, your industry or the mission of an organization you're partnering with, be sure that's clear to potential attendees. Work a purpose into your events by joining with another chapter or a nonprofit; co-host a skill-building workshop with a local nonprofit to expand both organizations' reach and impact; use sustainable event practices like choosing a venue that sources food locally, providing digital materials instead of printed handouts, and offsetting event emissions through a carbon credit donation; or have a clear community impact like dedicating a portion of event ticket proceeds to a local scholarship fund or inviting students from a nearby high school or college to attend and network alongside members. Adding purpose and values to an event adds meaning and can also help strengthen the chapter loyalty of those who attend.

Share what you have up your sleeve.

If you plan for these changes but don't announce them ahead of time, how helpful will they be? Make sure your event marketing, starting with your event description, reflects the changes. Where it makes sense, share that you're basing these changes on feedback from members. There's no need to call out that you're adding something specifically for millennials but rather making changes to better engage everyone. And don't forget to include some examples of what they'll see/get/appreciate if they attend! Whatever you do, the most important thing to remember with millennial members and members' guests is that for the best chance of engagement, hold events that allow them to connect and contribute through events that are interactive, meaningful, and shareable. And by prioritizing engagement, shareability, and purpose, you can create experiences that have the best chance of resonating with them.

