

Building The Future, One Puppy At A Time: Using A Wellness Lounge To Connect Chapters With The Next Generation



As association chapter members retire and leave your chapter, recruiting people to replace them remains a challenge. In addition to numbers, new members bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas and the potential for long-term membership.



We can't overstate the importance of engaging the next generation of members at the beginning of their careers. To keep new members involved for as long as possible, it's important to reach out to them early.

But here's where things can get complicated.

Traditional wine and speaker networking events and formal presentations have their place, but they often fail to resonate with generation Z, those born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s. Many of them are students, balancing packed class schedules with part-time jobs and personal commitments. They need a good reason to connect with your chapter, one that makes them see that your chapter really understands them and their needs.

Today's students are prioritizing wellness, mental health and meaningful community connections.

They're looking for environments where they feel supported and included, not where they're listening to a presentation and feel like they're being sold on an organization.

What if your next new member first encountered your organization while petting a therapy dog? Painting a picture? Or having a cup of tea and listening to relaxing music? Sounds unconventional, but that's exactly the idea behind the wellness lounge—a space designed to support students where they are while subtly connecting them to your chapter.

How can a chapter wellness lounge recruit younger chapter members?

With the pressure of exams, internships, jobs and the uncertainty of life after graduation, students are overwhelmed. As a result, wellness-focused events are showing up in larger numbers on college campuses. From stress-relief workshops to yoga sessions and mindfulness seminars, students are asking to pause, recharge and connect. Providing a space for students to relax will speak volumes about your chapter's priorities and values.

A chapter wellness lounge also sends a signal to these potential new members: you care about balance, support and well-being. Unlike traditional recruitment events that can feel hard sell and transactional, a lounge can offer a non-intimidating, soft introduction to your chapter and provides something students value in return. While creating natural opportunities for them to engage and make lasting connections.

What makes an effective chapter wellness lounge?

The magic of a wellness lounge is in the details. Adding, thoughtfully designed elements create an environment where students feel welcome, relaxed and open to conversation.

Here's are four ways to make your chapter wellness lounge what students are looking for.

Therapy dogs. Dogs can be a stress-reducing, emotional-connection powerhouse. Students naturally flock to pet-friendly events, and the presence of dogs immediately lowers anxiety levels. Plus, dogs are excellent conversation starters, which gives your chapter volunteers a chance to engage students and build rapport before they utter a single word about your chapter.

Coloring books and painting stations. Creative outlets like coloring and painting encourage



mindfulness and spark casual conversation. They're approachable ways for students to interact with your chapter without pressure. Unlike networking receptions where people often feel like they're on display and have to be ready for in-depth conversations, these are low-key experiences that are easy to smile, laugh and bond over.

Plants and natural décor. A calm, green environment fosters relaxation and enhances mood; plants and natural elements help transform a plain room into a quiet retreat. Consider holding a terrarium-building class, where students can take some of the calm with them. And giving away mini plants with QR codes linking to your association's website or Instagram can turn an aesthetically pleasing environment into a subtle recruitment tool.

Tea and light snacks. Many students are turning to herbal tea over coffee and soda. Offering tea and light snacks—what student will turn down free food?—encourages students to linger and provides more opportunities for connection. Branded mugs and reusable cups with your association logo serve as memorable swag, keeping your organization in their minds after they leave.

Set up a casual information table with a soft-touch call to action, such as "Follow us on Instagram for more student events!" or "Join our next wellness workshop." Consider hosting a short meditation, yoga or wellness talk or a mini workshop in the lounge featuring young professionals in your field. This not only provides valuable content for students but also naturally showcases your chapter as supportive and relevant.

It's about being subtle: start with the connection

The goal is simple: to make students feel seen, supported and curious enough to engage further on their own terms. A modest setup with a few key elements can spark meaningful engagement. And give students what they're looking for.

The key, in addition to creating a space students want to visit and linger in, is having approachable association members available to listen, answer questions and engage students. Without overwhelming those students.

All of this makes students more likely to remember your chapter and for the reasons you want.



Hosting a chapter wellness lounge

The response to wellness lounges has been overwhelmingly positive responses. Students often express surprise and gratitude, saying things like, “I didn’t expect to find a professional organization that actually cares about student stress.” That sentiment alone is a huge win for chapters looking to break through traditional recruitment barriers. And the universities appreciate the partnerships too, offering positive press and future collaboration opportunities.

Students expect authenticity, so it’s important to focus on being welcoming and approachable rather than selling membership. Keep your chapter wellness events simple and interactive. And ask for feedback to learn what works and where you could improve.

- **Who can help.** Set up a committee so that one person isn’t doing everything. But in addition, it’s important to build relationships with professors, for help around things like determining the right times, locations, and approaches.
- **Budget.** Therapy dogs, coloring supplies, plants, chapter swag, and snacks can fit into a modest budget. Since few chapters are swimming in extra funds, consider partnering with local businesses or student organizations to help with the food, plants, etc.
- **Location.** Choose spaces relevant to your industry—like the lounge in the chemistry building for the American Chemical Society or a business school common area for an economics or CPA association. This also helps ensure you’re connecting with your target audience.
- **Frequency.** Consider quarterly events to correspond with university schedules. And, depending on the space, you might be able to leave chapter information there year-round, while having it actively hosted during the school year.

Wellness lounges demonstrate that connecting with the next generation doesn’t have to be complicated. Students want to be included, supported, and valued. By meeting them where they are, you’ll create genuine engagement.

The trend toward “puppy yoga” and wellness-focused gatherings isn’t just a fad—it’s a reflection of what students truly seek. Leaning into these experiences, you can position your chapter as a relevant, caring, and approachable community.

So, if your chapter is looking to nurture future leaders and members, start small. A cup of tea, a coloring book, a few therapy dogs and watch how relationships blossom.

