

Celebrating Your Association Chapter Anniversary



It's the middle of "[INSERT MONTH]." Someone on your board reminds you that your chapter's "[INSERT ANNIVERSARY]" anniversary is only a few months away. And your heart drops. How can you possibly pull off an engaging, fun chapter event that people will want to attend?



With all that chapters need to do to run effectively, we'd bet that anniversaries are not something they prioritize; they often sneak up. When that happens, association chapter boards find themselves throwing something together at the last minute, stressing out, hoping for the best and wishing they'd remembered to start planning earlier.

Whether that sounds like your chapter, or you're a board that starts planning anniversary extravaganzas years in advance, there are a few actions you can take to make your chapter anniversary event all it can, and needs, to be.

5 Actions to Help You Deliver an Outstanding Chapter Anniversary Experience

Bring in help. Are you thinking you can ask one or two people to manage the planning and execution of the entire event? If you are, there's a good chance you're setting yourself up for failure. Instead, as one of your first activities, create an event committee made up of chapter board members and members at large. Together they can work to determine the high-level specifics of the event. Then,

they can work out the details: what needs to be done, when and by whom. And they can bring in additional help to execute specifics, like the food, the marketing, the speaker(s), etc.

Have a plan. Create a chapter event checklist, so you know you're not forgetting anything and can schedule activities in the order that they need to be completed; think about this in terms of what need a long lead time versus those things can wait till closer to the event. Places and people like the venue, the caterer and the speaker tend to book early, so they should be selected (and a deposit paid to secure them) further in advance. And then there are other things that can wait, like the Save the Date, the exact flow of the event and any printed materials the event will require, like menus and PowerPoint presentations.

Look for sponsors. There's no reason for your chapter to pay for everything. Before you start, be sure everyone is aware of the budget. But could you deliver a stronger event if you had help paying for some of it? Contact existing chapter sponsors and share the benefits of sponsoring your chapter anniversary event. In addition to talking to existing sponsors who could be looking for one more sponsorship opportunity, connect with potential sponsors, those haven't been able to afford, or haven't been looking for, an annual chapter sponsorship. They might be very interested in sponsoring a part of an event.

Consider your marketing. It's only a strong event if people know about it, register, pay and actually attend. Create a webpage for the event, where you can add details as they become available; this page, or another page, should accept online registrations and payment. Your social media channels are also good places for additional advertising. However, while social media can keep guests informed and get them talking about your event, it shouldn't be a replacement for personalized invitations sent by email and even by mail. If you have enough time, consider emailing or mailing Save the Date announcements. This alerts potential attendees that the event is being planned and gets many of them to put it on their calendars before they can even register. But it also gives you a chance to ask for volunteers, while checking email and physical addresses before spending more time and money on the actual invitation.

Make it repeatable. Once you've held your event and followed up with attendees for their thoughts, takeaways and recommendations (and maybe even learned about peoples' interest in planning future events), you'll have a better sense of what worked well and what needs to be tweaked for similar events. Maybe people loved the venue, but next time you should have some space set aside



for attendees to get away from the noise of the event just for a few minutes. The structures you put in place and lessons learned will allow you to repeat this plan similar for future events, armed with your event plan and a checklist for all those tasks that need to be accomplished and in what order.

What if you don't have much time to plan?

These steps may sound like they'll take a lot of work and time. They could. But all is not lost if you realize you're only a few weeks away from a chapter anniversary or other historical event you'd like to celebrate. If you don't have time to plan a large gathering, consider adding something to an already-planned event or conference, like a keynote speaker, a historical review of your chapter or a sit-down dinner to recognize the event.

There's no reason to wait for that special anniversary to celebrate your chapter. With some planning, you can hold chapter anniversary events your members are excited to tell their friends about, attend and talk about for a long time after the event (for all the right reasons).



