

Chapters – Are They Worth The Cost?



Are your chapters worth your time and money?

Yes, yes they are.



People join associations for a range of reasons, including the desire to develop and enhance their careers, a chance to impact public policy, and the emotional connection they can't get from their co-workers. Some also want more opportunities to be part of things that make them happy, like making new friends, getting more involved in their industries, and giving back to their professional and personal communities.

Many of those needs can be addressed well at the national level, online and through conferences, but some can be addressed more effectively at the local level through chapters.

Typically, people are more inclined to work together and organize when they can do it in person. Chapters make it easy for associations to bring their members together more frequently, and by doing so, they can:

Meet members' needs where they are and where they want to be. Members typically work long days so they don't have the money, time, or energy to drive or fly long distances for meetings and conferences or the desire to spend any more time on the computer than they already do.

Holding meetings and events locally allows members to grow professionally and personally close to home. They can more easily raise their own profiles, and perhaps even learn about and move into jobs that may not get posted on any of the job sites. It also means more relevant content can be delivered in person. Those same people who don't want to be on the computer may be more than happy to learn from a speaker for an hour.

Improve their project management, teamwork, and leadership skills. These are the soft skills members need to get ahead in their careers. As boards and committees are run by volunteers, these roles allow them to acquire the interpersonal skills they need to improve their positions at work.

Network more effectively. By gathering locally, those who work in the same industry, along with those that support them – hiring, marketing, training, etc. - can build long-term, trusted relationships, share and develop best practices, to improve themselves and their industries.

Yes, a chapter's priority is to benefit its members, but many of those benefits can also positively impact the parent associations. Chapters help associations:

Learn more about their members. Local events can provide additional useful data about members, including an understanding of who participates at a local level, but not nationally, and vice versa. This information can help associations better manage both their national and chapter programs.

Promote the interests of the association. Association staff can be small and overworked. There's no way they can hold monthly events in every state. Through local, regular meetings and events, and by disseminating the local impact of national information, chapters can do a better job of translating the organization's mission to the membership. The outcome is a collection of educated, engaged members who can help affect association-driven policy changes at the state, national and international levels.

Improve recruitment and retention. Chapters can be an expensive undertaking, but a strong chapter program can help associations recoup their costs. The right program improves member engagement, and engaged members stay, they renew, and they bring guests with them; those guests eventually become members.

Chapters are a highly useful and effective way to recruit, engage, and keep members and can positively impact an association's return on investment. Not having chapters, or not having enough of them, could be a large missed opportunity for national organizations.

