

Do You Need An Executive Director, An AMS, Or A Combination? A Conversation With Patrick Alger, Encore Engagement Solutions



We're not telling you something new – association chapter membership and engagement has always been a struggle. From what we've heard recently that struggle is worse than ever. What's the situation in your chapter? Are you doing a solid job engaging your members the way you need to keep them as members?



It's never been easy. For most of your board and your committees, managing your chapter isn't their only job. Most have full time jobs and they're running your chapter as best they can, in addition. These days, with more association chapter members retiring and chapters having trouble replacing the holes they're leaving, your current volunteers may find themselves busier than ever, trying to do three jobs instead of just the one they signed up for.

You know you need help, but what's the right move for your association chapter? What kind of help would your organization benefit from, to get everything organized and on track and leave your association chapter board and your committees to focus on engagement and retention?

For some chapters, the answer may be hiring a paid executive director (ED). For others, an association management software (AMS) system may be what they need, to automate many of their

manual processes, provide a single source for things like membership data and financials, and increase chapter member engagement.

Is there a clear line in the sand? Can we say with certainty that if you want to do X, you need an ED but if you want help with Y an AMS is the right choice? Or is there a third group of chapters, that may find that combination of the two – a paid ED and an AMS – is what they need?

For clarity, we spoke to Patrick Algyer, Chief Strategist for Encore Engagement Solutions, an Association Management Company. And his answer may surprise you.

Encore Management is a StarChapter preferred vendor. According to Patrick, his company helps associations be more successful “by taking an aggressive and simple approach to association management,” by providing direct management support and/or training for a chapter’s staff, volunteers, and members. Hiring an ED or an entire Association Management Company, Patrick says, delivers chapter benefits that save time by providing experienced professionals who understand how associations run and who provide the necessary assistance to service the organization, and its members, effectively.

Chapter associations are almost always 100% volunteer run. Those volunteers are professionals and experts in their fields, but most don’t have experience running a nonprofit like a chapter association. Association chapter board members are learning as they go along. An ED can provide the higher-level tools and knowledge that’s needed to allow the chapter to run appropriately.

But Patrick says, volunteers and the ED also need uncomplicated ways to be able to take care of the daily tasks needed to run the organization, like posting current and pertinent and fresh content on a website, emailing members or supporters, promoting upcoming events, managing their member and financial databases, etc. He believes an AMS is a wonderful way for everyone to do all of that. And well.

“It is imperative,” he says, “organizations provide a central location to access information about their mission, news updates, fresh content, links to their social media, a way to contact the organization (that is monitored daily) and proprietary member/supporter-only information.”

What about those organizations that may not be ready for an ED? Patrick believes that if an association chapter doesn’t have the financial resources to hire an ED, it’s important they have an AMS. “An all-in-one AMS is the best option for small organizations with small budgets,” he says. “With this



solution,” he explains, “volunteers can work everything in one platform versus using multiple platforms, for their member database, website, event registration, email, etc.”

Patrick doesn't believe that organizations with more resources should hire an ED and skip the AMS. He says that all chapter organizations can benefit from having an AMS, since an AMS centralizes and streamlines the data and processes used by association chapter volunteers and the ED and makes it easier for everyone.

It's all about need. What are you doing well and where can your chapter use some help? Do a deep dive and develop an inventory and a list of what you can improve. Be sure to include the budget you have for making changes like this. Once you have an idea of where you are and where you want to be, talk to an AMS provider like StarChapter and an Association Management Company like Encore, for help figuring out what's right for your chapter.

