

# Getting Members Back To In-person Events – How To Approach The Different Meeting Personalities You Need To Engage



One of the many things COVID-19 showed association chapters is that they can hold virtual events people want to attend; many chapters kept themselves from closing during the height of the pandemic by holding virtual and hybrid events. However, now that things have opened up a bit, many association chapters want to see more in-person attendance.



For some chapters, getting people to return to in-person association chapter events has been a difficult transition. We came across a helpful article that breaks potential meeting attendees into four categories and shares what each group needs to know to be comfortable returning in-person. Many of these ideas can easily be included in your chapter event email marketing or on your event online information and registration page. There's even a tip for those who really have no plans to attend in person.

## The different meeting personalities you need to engage

**The Eagers.** We love this group. No convincing or hard sells here. They want desperately to be with people in person. Even so, it's still important to show them the value of in-person chapter event attendance.

To really engage this group, and in case they need to justify the time off or cost, mention the things they'll get that they've been missing with virtual chapter events, like handshakes, a chance to meet in person with experts, and more.

**The Hesitants:** They're considering attending in person but may need a little extra push to show up. They need to understand clearly what will occur once they get there and the benefits of attending in person. Explain how it will be easier and they'll have more chances to ask questions, get clarification on a topic and share their expertise.

If you think this group could be nervous about being around others in person, share some of the "more ways to engage" recommendations below.

**The Reluctants:** They're thinking about attending in person but they'd rather not. This group prefers virtual association chapter events, as long as they continue to meet their needs. Your more introverted members probably fit in this group. What could you tell them or ask them to do that would make them comfortable in person?

Ask for their help planning the event and the agenda. Is there something they really want that they haven't been able to accomplish in your virtual meetings? Give them a chance to do it in-person. Also, your more introverted members may need more breaks attending in-person, so set up a quiet space, and let them know there will be a space for them to go if they need it. Share the meeting format and that there will be ample break times to recharge. Name badges can also help; there's a good chance attendees may have forgotten the names of people they haven't seen in person in a long time.

**No-Ways.** This group has no intention of coming in person, no matter what you offer them. It's critical you don't ignore them; they've probably been some of your biggest supporters of virtual events. Think about how you can continue to engage this group.

Consider holding some association chapter hybrid events, or some solely virtual networking and education events that will keep them loyal to your chapter.

### **Some more cross-group ways to engage**

Here are a few other ways to drive people to your in-person events, and maybe even get some of those No Ways to change their minds.



**Charge the same for virtual and in-person association chapter attendance (or more for virtual).**

Someone on the fence about returning in person and/or a little cost conscious could see the value and decide to be there in person.

**Make your in-person events the ones people don't want to miss.** Get super specific with your benefits of in-person attendance. Who will be there? Consider publishing a list of those who've registered (StarChapter has this capability). People can think early about who they want to connect with.

**Remind them how to do those things they haven't done for a while.** Some people may be nervous about being in a room with others, many of which they may have only connected with virtually for a long time.

- Make networking comfortable. It should be easy for people to join conversations. Don't ignore someone standing next to you. If they look uncomfortable, they probably are. Turn around and make them feel included.
- Hugs and handshakes may (or may not) be acceptable. Remind them to ask before leaning in for a hug. Fist bumps are all the rage these days!
- A reminder that masks are optional. They shouldn't feel uncomfortable wearing one.
- It's ok to get emotional. They may be seeing people they haven't seen in several years – tears are just fine.

Association chapters can't just expect to start holding all in-person events and see all their members and guests automatically attend. Your audience is made up of real people, and those people will probably need some gentle nudges to start attending in person. Give them the reasons to be there in-person, and they'll show up (or most of them will).



