

Give Your Introverts Eight Ways To Thrive In Chapter Meetings



You may not realize that your association chapter meetings could be uncomfortable for some of your members and guests; many people aren't comfortable walking into a crowded room or a room with small groups of people who seem to have known each other forever, even if that isn't actually true.



After they register at the event and walk in alone, these people may find the one person they know and spend much of their time with them, until that person excuses themselves or introduces them to someone new and slips away. If they don't recognize anyone, they may stand in a corner sipping a drink and staring at their phone waiting for the main part of the event to start.

Avoiding interactions with new people or not speaking up in a group can keep a person from making new connections, offering solutions and hearing things that could benefit them personally or professionally. Holding back also keeps people from benefitting from that person's knowledge, skills and achievements.

Stepping forward and actively participating in a chapter event can be hard, especially those people who are introverted or neurodivergent. But you can help by offering ideas for self-care and self-promotion that are easy to implement.

8 Ways Attendees can be More Successful at Chapter Events and Meetings

Here are eight things members and member guests can do to feel more comfortable attending your association chapter meetings and events. Share these in your chapter's electronic communications and on your website and suggest people try a few to see what works best for them.

- Get comfortable initiating conversations. Many people find it difficult to communicate publicly and in a group. Conversation starters can help. They can be related to the chapter, event or topic, but for some, more general starters work well, like the following. To drive real conversation, these starters shouldn't be able to be answered with yes or no.
 - How did you hear about this event?
 - What do you hope to get out of the event tonight?
 - What's been the best part of your week so far?
 - What's the best (or worst) networking experience you've ever had?
 - What's the most interesting thing you've event learned from one of these events?
- Speak up early in meetings. Ask questions or make comment early. Some people find themselves getting more nervous as they wait to speak. Recommend they try to ask their question or make their comment when they see an easy opening, instead of waiting till the end.
- Add to another person's point. Some people don't like asking questions or starting a new conversation. Instead, they can comment on a point someone has made or provide a potential solution to an issue.
- Swap self-deprecating statements for assertive language. People who are uncomfortable in situations may make comments like "I could never do that" or "that seems so hard." Exchanging negative language for more positive wording, like "I could try that," or "that sounds like a good idea," changes how the words that follow, and the person, are received, fostering connections and improving engagement.
- Make small changes. Some people would really prefer smaller interactions with your chapter and your members, rather than attending a large meeting. Micro-volunteering is a great way for a person to have an impact and get to know people one-to-one. These small volunteering opportunities could make them more comfortable attending your events in the future.



- Taking breaks as necessary. Attendees should feel comfortable walking out of the event for a few minutes to stretch and decompress. (Set up a quiet space away from your main meeting space to give people a place to regroup if they need to.)
- Having a goal. People can be more comfortable attending if they are clear on what they want to get out of being there. It's fine to go to an event to get away from your desk but having a "why" can make it easier to engage and find people who share that goal. Goals can include things as simple as meeting a certain number of new people or connecting with a specific person (see the bullet below on providing attendee lists ahead of time)?
- Bringing a friend. Everything is easier when you're not alone. Finding someone with common goals or someone they know professionally or personally automatically gives you a person to talk to!

Create the Association Chapter Events People Want to be Part of

Your members can feel ready to attend, but if your chapter meeting or event doesn't feel comfortable or safe once they get there, it may still not have the impact you're going for. Here are three ways to make your events one's people feel comfortable attending and participating in.

- Give potential attendees permission to be selective. There's no reason a person needs to feel they have to attend every chapter event and meeting. Your event descriptions should include the details that help them decide if an event is what they're looking for. Share that it's fine to choose the activities that resonate with them. Also tell them that if there is something they would like to see the chapter provide they should share it with you. And that you'd love their help creating more events they'd like to participate in.
- Provide meeting agendas and attendance lists beforehand. Make the "which events to attend" decision easier by sending the agenda and attendee list before an event. Increase a person's comfort with attending by sharing who will be there, what will be covered and how the meeting will flow.
- Provide ways to communicate asynchronously. Give them the chance to comment when they're comfortable doing so, potentially increasing their comfort attending the event. Ask questions on



your chapter forum that connect to the event topic and write a blog on the topic that asks for comments. In addition to showing their thought leadership before the event and engaging with attendees beforehand, you may get feedback and adjust the agenda to make it better fit attendee needs.

Talk about the different supports you provide and how people can help themselves, in your communications and at the start of your meetings. The more your members and member guests are aware of all the chapter is doing to make their connection to your events easier and more comfortable, the better the chance they'll attend, and be an active participant, rather than a fly on the wall.

