

Health Matters: Launching A Chapter Wellness Challenge



If you have your ear to chapter chatter, you may hear members talking about how they wish they had more time for physical activity and to take better care of their health. Fitting in self-care can be tough, between the shift to working from home and overall family responsibilities and in the case of your members, giving time to your chapter.



What if you could help improve their physical health and mental wellbeing and ultimately, their connections with each other and your chapter?

Wellness challenges can be a simple way to do all of that.

For many, some of the biggest drivers of a person's ability to stick to a program including finding the right program and accountability partners to them motivated and moving forward. Chapters provide a built-in peer group, and with a plan, you can hold challenges that will resonate and engage your members.

What Is a wellness challenge?

Wellness challenges have all sorts of names, including well-being initiatives, wellness incentive programs, health habits challenges and healthy living campaigns. Whatever you call them, they're



typically short-term activities that allow participants to work on some part of their health and track their progress. Sometimes there are challenge winners and often some sort of prize.

People often complete wellness challenges on their own, but as there are often better outcomes when people work together toward a goal, many chapters create team participation challenges.

Examples of challenges include walking, physical activity and fitness challenges, hydration goals, mindfulness and meditation streaks and sleep improvement challenges.

How do wellness challenges help members?

Most wellness challenge benefits aren't a surprise. They fall primarily into three buckets – physical, mental/emotional and social/community. Participants typically get stronger, pick up a new habit, feel better about themselves and have a stronger connection to those they completed the challenge with.

Another benefit may not immediately come to mind — wellness challenges can help improve members' professional development. Depending on your industry and the challenge, participants may learn about wellness concepts useful in their industries, like HR professionals who participate in meditation and yoga challenges and share takeaways with their employees. Professional development is also an outcome when participants walk together, work out in a group or simply talk about the challenge, which can lead to other conversations and informal networking.

Benefits for a chapter

Wellness challenges offer fun, low-pressure activities members can take part in from almost anywhere. They don't need to be together to drink water, walk, meditate or exercise unless they choose to.

This flexibility also helps you boost engagement and chapter reputation, when members and guests see activities and connections continuing between chapter in-person events and your support of their work-life balance. They see how you understand their needs extend past their professional credentials and that membership can help them become "whole person healthy."

Setting up a chapter wellness challenge

You can always start simple, like counting steps, drinking a certain amount of water or simply moving



daily. Figure out what will resonate best with your members, what makes the most sense for them and the needs of your chapter, and there's a good chance everyone will experience stronger outcomes.

Step 1: Choose the focus. To choose the right activity, do your research. Explore chapter demographics, e.g. age, life stage, caregiving responsibilities and consider questions like:

- Are members in roles that are high stress? physical? Are they stuck at a desk all day?
- What do members struggle with? Burnout? isolation? Lack of quality sleep?

Ask members through surveys, polls, etc. what they'd be interested in, how much time they have to commit, the kinds of prizes they'd expect, etc. Think about your goals, outside of improving members' lives. Do you want to boost member chapter engagement? Improve work-life balance? Share a skill?

Some chapters will learn members will be happy with a simple team-based challenge recorded in a spreadsheet, with short and quick messaging, while others will want harder driven events that require a complete communications plan and a leaderboard.

Don't forget to consider chapter capacity; how much time and budget do you have for a wellness challenge? Can existing volunteers run the program, or would you need to entice a few more volunteers to help?

Step 2: Set a timeframe. Challenges can be as long, or as short, as you'd like them to be. Whatever length you choose, keep in mind that challenges often see a dip in participation about halfway through, even short challenges.

Step 3: Choose a tracking method and consider the technology. What do members have the skills for? Would they need to purchase or download an app? Or could you just use the honor system and have people talk about their progress in a group chat or online chapter forum set up for the challenge. Can your existing systems track and manage a wellness challenge? What kind of training would members need to track their progress?

Step 4: Create teams. Many chapters opt for team challenges, which can improve member connections with each other. You could set up the teams, so members are connected randomly, you could ask people to choose their own teams, or you could use a hybrid option, where participants choose one or two people and you select the rest. To create team pride and identity, have teams



choose their name and maybe even a logo. (Team Thunder Walkers, for example, will probably perform better than Team 4!)

Step 5: Communicate regularly. To build excitement, mention and market the challenge before it starts, creating a communication plan and kicking the challenge off publicly. And continue to communicate throughout the program and once it's complete. Share updates, encouragement and highlights through something like a community forum for each team and a member only section of your website for everyone participating. Ask participants to share wins, struggles, photos and encouragement. Drive communication between participants by asking questions and posting weekly tips. Mention it in meetings, online and through emails to the whole chapter. Communicating with the entire chapter, BTW, shows how much fun everyone is having and helps improve the chance more people will participate next time.

Since you know participation is going to drop partway through, look for ways to keep people excited. Send re-engagement emails or message at the halfway point and consider a prize drawing for those who are still active; introduce a bonus challenge or surprise element, like adding a group outdoor yoga class; ask leaders to share how it's going for them, knowing you may need to nudge those chapter leaders to participate.

Celebrate as a chapter

The end of a wellness challenge is just as important as the launch. Recognize every participant, even those who didn't finish, so they know that you see them (Survey them after the challenge to learn why they dropped out). People will also love to see the collective impact of everyone who participated, like total steps walked, consecutive days of mindfulness logged or glasses of water consumed, which shows how their individual efforts were part of something bigger.

Chapter wellness challenges can compound engagement in your chapter in ways you might not expect. A member meets two new people and gets those new connections engaged with the chapter, which can turn into membership, committee roles and maybe even chapter leadership. These challenges can be the entry point into the deep, lasting engagement you want people to have with your chapter.

Wellness challenges don't need to be complex to be meaningful. Just invite members to join and show up for their health together.

