

Hold Effective New Member Orientations To Keep Members Coming Back



Remember your first few months as a new chapter member? You joined, went to events, possibly felt lost and may have even questioned your decision to join.



When new members join an association chapter, some get involved proactively; they introduce themselves to board members and general members and they actively take on volunteer roles. More often, new members wait for the chapter to come to them. If you don't hold new member orientations and you don't share information and connections members need early to get the most from their membership, some could lose interest before they have the chance to get started.

These are some of the activities and strategies that have helped our chapter clients connect with their new members; we hope they spark ways to improve your own new member engagement. We also spoke with Estefania Walstrum, chapter administrator, IFMA Silicon Valley, who shares how her chapter builds meaningful connections with new members early. And you'll see more than a few similarities.

5 tips for garnering lasting new member chapter engagement:

Share the why and how before their first meeting. If you wait till orientation to share or reinforce the benefits of chapter membership, like networking, continuing education, advocacy, mentorship and friendship, you're missing the chance to get them excited for all you offer. Use access points like your

“Why Join our Chapter?” landing page, Thank You for Joining page and follow up calls and emails to set expectations for membership and emphasize the value of your chapter, to help them feel welcome and connected and remind them that joining your chapter was the right decision. They'll also appreciate contacts for questions, ways to update their contact information, schedules of upcoming events, including new member orientation and ways to volunteer, as well as upcoming chapter volunteer opportunities.

Make attending orientation easy. Hold orientation in different formats — in person, virtual and hybrid — to make it easier for more new members to attend. Schedule orientations throughout the year so new members don't have to wait months to learn things they should be aware of at the beginning. Since people learn at different paces and in different ways, consider recording orientation and making it available in the members-only section of your website for everyone to review.

Cover just the essentials in the meeting. Including all you think they'll need to know to get the most from membership can be overwhelming for the new members as well as those presenting. Keep meetings short, let them know where they can find details and follow up by email to clarify things like, like board member names and contact information, chapter mission and benefits of membership; key programs, events and ways to volunteer; chapter website URL and social media channels, etc.

Create an engaging meeting environment. Hold orientations that will engage the largest number of people. Include time to introduce key chapter members, with time to meet and speak with them, highlight the benefits of membership through member stories and encourage questions and conversations during the orientation and after.

Provide clear next steps. To keep momentum going, and interest high, reshare links to resources after the event. Proactively invite members to their next chapter event or committee meeting and consider pairing new members with more senior members so new members don't have to attend that meeting alone. Provide micro volunteering opportunities to get them involved, like asking them to write a blog post about what drew them to the chapter, or what their first few months as a member have been like. Ask for new member feedback on meetings, food or speakers; they often provide a great outside perspective.

A Conversation with Estefania Walstrum, Chapter Administrator, IFMA Silicon Valley Chapter



Why is a strong new member orientation critical in the first few weeks of membership?

It helps new members understand the value of their investment, recognize the importance of their role within the organization and feel confident getting involved. During this time, members often have many questions, e.g. how to engage with the chapter, why involvement matters, who the chapter leaders are, what educational opportunities are available and where to find important information.

What format have you found works best for orientations, and why does simplicity matter?

In-person meetings tend to be the most effective format for new member orientations. They allow for real-time questions, meaningful discussion and valuable networking opportunities. Keeping the experience simple is key; we don't want to overwhelm new members or give the impression that they must immediately take on significant commitments. Instead, the focus should be on helping them understand that their experience and benefits will grow in proportion to the effort they choose to invest.

What information is essential for new members to hear on day one?

New members should clearly understand that we are here as a resource and that the chapter provides a strong platform to network and build meaningful relationships. It's equally important to set expectations. IFMA Silicon Valley is not a venue for hard sales. Members are expected to respect a professional, relationship-focused environment. New members should also be aware of the many opportunities available to support their growth, including ways to advance their careers through educational offerings. Highlighting key programs and resources such as mentoring program opportunities, the FMP (facility management professional designation) Scholarship and other chapter initiative, helps them see the tangible value of getting involved.

How do you keep orientations engaging rather than overwhelming or one sided?

We encourage interaction by asking questions throughout the session and inviting participation from the audience. We also include dedicated time for Q&A at the end to address any remaining questions. We wrap up with a casual happy hour with light appetizers, giving new members a relaxed setting to connect, network and start building relationships.

Why are member stories or interaction so effective during orientation?

They show real examples of how people benefit from being involved. Hearing firsthand experiences helps new members see the value beyond just information on a slide, it builds trust and a sense of community. Interaction also keeps people engaged, making them more likely to ask questions, connect with others and feel comfortable participating early on.



What clear next steps should every new member leave with after the session?

Every new member should leave with a clear sense of how to get started right away. That includes knowing which upcoming events or meetings to attend, how to access key resources and communications, and who to reach out to with questions. They should also understand a simple first step to get involved, whether that's joining a committee, signing up for a program or connecting with a mentor, so they can begin building relationships and seeing value immediately.

What's one tip you'd give to chapters looking to improve new member orientation?

Focus on clarity over quantity. It's better to leave new members with a few clear, actionable takeaways than to overwhelm them with too much information. When people know exactly how to take their first step and feel confident doing it, they're far more likely to stay engaged.