

Hosting Chapter Events That Cut Through The End-of-Year Chaos



Many of the StarChapter blog posts came to be because of the real conversations, emails, surveys and comments we've received from association chapter leaders, sponsors, vendors, what we've heard at conferences and what we've read in industry journals. We're committed to shaping our posts with the questions, trends and challenges chapters face. As we plan our 2026 blog, we wanted to reflect on what you told us was most relevant and important to your chapters and boards in 2025 and hear what you'd like to read and learn more about in 2026.



For many association chapters, the end-of-year event is more of a yearly tradition held out of habit than an event with a strategy and goal. The committee finds a date, books a space, orders food and sends out a single invitation, maybe two, without much planning.

Routine, run-of-the-mill year-end events are lost opportunities. Potential guests—members, sponsors, vendors, etc.—are pulled in countless directions in November and December. They're wrapping up projects, juggling family commitments and navigating travel and holiday plans. All of this can make it tough for them to find time for your chapter gathering. Unless they see a compelling reason to attend. The good news? With some intention and creativity, your chapter's end-of-year event can become one that members look forward to, not something they skip without a second thought. Here are six suggestions for year-end chapter events that break through the clutter and get more people to show up. And enjoy themselves.



1. **Rethink the purpose and format.** Parties with a purpose attract more people. Before you dive into planning, explore why you want to get people together before the new year. Have a clear purpose, and it'll be easier for people to see a good reason to show up—and feel their time was well spent. Do you want to:

- Celebrate chapter accomplishments
- Recognize volunteers and leaders
- Spark engagement and new ideas for next year
- Raise funds or advocate for a cause
- Or some combination?

Once you have your “why?” the “what” becomes easier to work out. Maybe you hold a:

- **Year-in-review celebration.** Share highlights, wins and stories of impact from the past year.
- **Volunteer appreciation night.** Recognize those who kept things running.
- **Vision for next year mixer.** Combine a social event with light brainstorming to get input around goals and opportunities in the new year.

2. **Stand out with a unique theme or format.** Create something that feels different from everything else you've done and they'll get invited to this time of year. It doesn't need to be extravagant or expensive, just fresh and memorable, align with your chapter culture and feel like an intentional break from the ordinary, like:

- **“Cozy and casual” brunch, lunch or happy hour.** Encourage members to come in comfy attire, maybe even pajamas. Have an amazing speaker on a topic members have mentioned repeatedly.
- **Volunteer and social hybrid.** Partner with a local nonprofit for a hands-on activity that includes refreshments and networking.
- **Game night or trivia.** Build connection through friendly competition—try trivia based on your chapter's year, industry facts or fun facts about members, sponsors and vendors.
- **“Un-holiday” gathering:** Skip the decorations and focus on time for connection, reflection and gratitude.

3. **Make it convenient and low stress.** Hold an event that feels pressure free, to signal that you understand and respect their time. Here are a few ways to remove barriers to attendance:

- **Keep it short.** Aim for 60–90 minutes.
- **Choose lighter time slots.** A midweek lunch or late-afternoon gathering might work better than a Friday night in December. Or even wait till January of the new year, when things are quiet.



- **Offer hybrid options.** A quick virtual session or live stream can engage those who can't get away to attend in person.
- **Be family friendly.** Hold an event appropriate for spouses and/or children. If you choose an event that isn't child friendly, consider providing childcare.

4. **Promote the event smartly.** Even the best event will fall flat if members never hear about it or hear too late. Start year-end chapter event messaging early, ideally before Thanksgiving. Get on people's calendars and in their "must attend" focus by:

- **Including a save-the-date.** Follow that with countdown reminders.
- **Making it easy to remember.** Provide a link to add the event to calendars.
- **Not just focusing on logistics.** Cover format, theme, purpose, etc., and frame it as a "reward" or pause during the end-of-year craziness.
- **Get creative with subject lines.** Be engaging. Consider an email subject line like: "Need a break from the year-end grind? Join us for connection and reflection." (Stuck on a catchy line? Consider asking AI for help.)
- **Remember - FOMO (fear of missing out) is real.** Use photos or testimonials from past events to show how these gatherings are special.

5. **Add real value for attendees.** Food and fun are great, but if you want to boost attendance and engagement, think of things something people can take with them. The best events leave attendees saying, "I'm glad I came," which happens when they walk away inspired, connected and energized, through opportunities like:

- **Networking.** Include intentional time for meeting new people or reconnecting with those they only see a few times a year.
- **Swag or giveaways.** Create excitement and visibility with chapter-branded items or raffle prizes. (Ask vendors and sponsors to help here.)
- **Mini learning session.** Deliver a short talk on practical year-end topics, like goal setting, time management or industry trends you expect in the new year.
- **Spotlight success stories.** Have members share wins or lessons learned from the past year.

6. **Don't forget the follow up.** Extend the impact and keep the post-event momentum going, while making next year's planning easier.

- **Send thank-you messages** to attendees, volunteers, and sponsors.
- **Share photos and highlights** on your chapter's website and social channels.
- **Post a short recap** in your chapter newsletter or member forum.



- **Ask for feedback.** A quick, two-question survey (AI can help here, too) to learn what worked and where to tweak.

Stay true to your chapter culture

The most successful events reflect your chapter's (and your members') unique tone and interests. A sleek, formal dinner might fit one chapter; a casual networking coffee might be better for another. Start planning early, coordinate with your board and choose what feels authentic. A well-executed, meaningful event doesn't need to be big to make a big impact.

End-of-year events should be more than just another item on your chapter checklist. With purpose, creativity, and a little planning, they can be the highlight of your chapter calendar—something members want to attend, even at their busiest.

Share your ideas for successful year-end chapter events by commenting below or by email—we'd love to feature your ideas in future posts. And, if you want more practical tips for running your chapter smoothly all year long, subscribe to the StarChapter newsletter.

