

Positioning An Association Chapter Event As An Opportunity For Everyone



Ask association board members what stresses them, and you'll hear similar concerns across chapters: registrations for events have flatlined or dropped and revenue is much lower than they'd like or need. These concerns are becoming more of an issue as the average member ages increases and younger professionals aren't joining fast enough.



The problem may not be your chapter programming. If you're like many, your events are engaging and you're creating a welcoming environment for your different audiences. The problem may be how you talk about those programs to those audiences.

An event description that says nothing

Chapter volunteers spend weeks lining up panelists, booking venues, coordinating food and (hopefully) marketing the event. A few weeks before the event, if you're lucky, someone remembers that it hasn't been added to the chapter website. A volunteer logs in to your website's backend and sets up the event description and registration page. But the description is bare bones: CEU – 2 credits. Legislation impacting the industry. 6–8 p.m. Joe's Bar and Grill.

Where's the story those thinking of attending can relate to that will make them care about the event or your chapter? There's nothing showing they'd even be welcome if they decided to spend the money (where's the member versus guest price?) and attend.

An event description is one of the most common missed opportunities in chapter marketing. It's typically an afterthought sadly, instead of being a central piece of a chapter's engagement strategy.

Speak to a broader audience

The instinct for many chapters is to position events for existing members who understand the context of an event or a program and will fill in the gaps on their own. And that perception could be tightening your new member pipeline. A too simple description may be acceptable to your members of 15 years who know what a CEU is and can fill in the gaps around how the event will flow. But for those who are newer to the industry, in an adjacent industry or thinking about a career change who found your chapter on Google, it won't get them in the door.

Expanding and reframing the description can give you the impact you need. Instead of "Legislation impacting the petroleum industry," something like "Not sure how the latest regulatory changes in the petrochemical industry are affecting your work? Join us for an enlightening conversation with INSERT NAMES OF PANELISTS about what's shifting in 2026 and what those changes could mean for those working and navigating our field."

If your goal is to attract multiple audiences to your event, a robust event description is a must. To help expand the event description:

- Include sample takeaways the different audiences can engage with
- Provide speaker bios or links to them to show your connection to industry thought leaders
- Link the location so people know where it will be held
- Identify how to get questions answered before the event
- Include the member versus guest price, so people can see one of the benefits of membership

Extend the welcome past the description — 3 tips

If a member guest attends your event but you leave them to flounder once they're in the room, you've lost the chance to connect them to your chapter. Here are a few things you can do at the event and subsequently, which will go a long way toward getting and keeping them engaged.



Don't forget a welcome and introductions. Start with a few words from your chapter president or other board member. Introduce the board members in attendance, and any relevant committee members, giving people who don't know your chapter a chance to see who they may want to connect with, learn about all the great volunteer work you do and get an idea where they could fit in.

Include time for questions and connection. Newcomers rarely walk up to strangers and introduce themselves. Allow time for small group conversations, hold moderated question and answer sessions and designate volunteers to say hi to people they don't recognize, all of which can help attendees feel more included and less intimidated.

Let guests know who else will be there. Just as you want your board to see who will be in the room, check to see if your chapter AMS (Association Management System) platform will allow those who haven't yet registered to see who will be there. That can be helpful for someone thinking of attending alone, as they can look to see if they'll know people or if there's someone they want to be sure to meet. If your AMS has that feature, promote it in your event description and describe where to find and use it.

Have a plan for what comes after the meeting

Someone attends their first chapter meeting. They have a good time and may have some good takeaways. And then they hear nothing and they figure you aren't really interested in them as members. Without follow up, you'll lose them. No email about the next event? No invitation to a smaller subgroup event? No information about how to join? Pepper the event with information about how they can learn more, get involved or connect with those they met or may want to meet.

Follow up with that same content after the event, in emails, on the website, in social media and maybe even by phone. Remind attendees of everything your chapter has to offer, and there's a better chance they'll remember you, whether that person is a member guest, new member or someone who's been in your chapter for 5 years.

Whatever you do, be intentional

Building a new member pipeline requires intentionality. It's about making a connection to a person, sharing how you can be relevant across their career journey, even if they may not fit what they think is the traditional profile of a member in your chapter.



You don't need multiple events to reach multiple audiences, unless of course your volunteers have the capacity. You need event descriptions and language for the events that speak to each audience. Something like, "Whether you've been doing this for a decade or you're still figuring out if this is the right path for you, you'll leave with something useful" is always a good way to start.