

Re-engaging Association Chapter Members After The Height Of The Pandemic



COVID-19 put a damper on the ability of association chapters to engage well with their members. Many chapters found workarounds, by moving to virtual events and adding more online resources and programming. Now that things are opening back up, many chapters are doing a great job returning to holding in-person association chapter events, while keeping up with their online and virtual programming. They've struck a great balance. If that's your chapter, you deserve some serious congrats. You've managed to do something other chapters are having a hard time accomplishing.



Because they couldn't connect with members in person, some association chapters decided not to engage at all. They didn't hold virtual events and let their websites and social media channels stagnate. As a result, many of their members looked elsewhere for support. Now, as people continue to become more comfortable attending in person, these chapters must find ways to get their members (re)interested in their chapters, in-person, virtually and online.

Wherever your chapter falls, here are three ways to give members what they need to engage and (re)engage, with your association chapter, in-person and virtually.

3 ways to increase member engagement

Step up your online content game. Engagement doesn't mean moving to only in-person events and ignoring your association chapter website, email and social media. You have members who will never be comfortable returning in-person and others who have gotten used to getting what they need virtually and would prefer to continue that way. It's time to revisit, revise and expand your association chapter online presence and virtual resources, so all members (and member guests) see the continued value in membership in your chapter.

- **Share members' stories.** Every association chapter member has a story, and your members should be telling theirs. Provide parameters – what do you want readers/watchers to take from a member's short video or Q&A? Should they talk about why they joined, why they've stayed a member in your association chapter, how your chapter helped them get through COVID-19, etc.? Sharing member stories online does a great job showing the value your chapter provides and reignites people's interest.
- **Add content only for members.** Your members are part of a special community. Provide content in your association chapter members-only forum that's just for them, like speaker recordings, topic-specific forum threads and online networking.
- **Enhance your job board and add a career center.** The uncertainty of the past few years means there's a good chance more than a few of your members are looking for new jobs. Make it as easy as possible for them to find the career assistance and guidance they need with an association chapter job board. In addition to open jobs, think about the content that would help members with their job search, like editorials and career advice, virtual job fairs, and access to learning and development courses to improve their skills.

Add member challenges. People love a good contest. What can you do to get your members excited and interested in returning in person that will also be easy for volunteers to manage?

- **Raffle.** People love giveaways, especially if it involves money or chapter swag. Hold a raffle based on event attendance. If 50 people attend in person, raffle \$500. If 75 people attend, make it \$1000. And if a member brings a guest, consider giving each an extra raffle ticket.
- **Free attendance.** Members who attend three events in a row can attend the fourth for free. The right Association Management System (AMS) can easily track this and allow you to run reports to see where everyone is in their in-person meeting attendance streak.
- **Chapter swag.** Bring a guest, get a piece of chapter swag. Look in your marketing closet. There are probably more than a few things you can give away, and you've probably had them for so long that they've depreciated, so it won't cost you much.



Incentivize the behaviors you want to see. Want more people at your in-person association chapter events? Make it a no brainer for them to say yes. You may think you should price your virtual events less than your in-person ones, but if you want people to attend in person, price your virtual events significantly higher than your in-person ones, and watch what happens.

The changes you're considering

Before you start adding back what you think members want, it's critical to understand what they need. Do they want in-person networking? Online education? Or maybe something completely different?

Surveying association chapter members and asking questions in association chapter focus groups will give you good information, but you may also have association chapter data that can shed some light. Review data from your virtual events, in-person events if you've done any, as well as your learning and social media platforms. Look where people are (and aren't) spending their time. What topics are keeping them on your association chapter website longer? What recordings are getting the most views? What kinds of comments are you seeing? This information can give you insights that can help you deliver more value and engage more with members by allowing you to provide what you know they're looking for.

Once you've made your first few changes, ask how successful you've been. If members like what they see, continue on that path. If they give feedback that says otherwise, tweak your offerings and try again. As we continue to recover, what you offer may need to be fluid, as your members continue to figure out just what it is they want and need from your chapter. Keep working to get it right, and your members will be happier and more engaged for it.

